

INNOVATION, CULTURE AND EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Professor Lucy Eraikhuemen

Meaning of the Concepts

Innovation

Innovation simply means something new. It could be a new idea, a new process, a new method, a new tool, etc. A characteristic of innovation is that, this “new” is accepted as better than the old or former. In other words, innovation yields better results than the former in a system where it is applied. It can be said that the ultimate goal of innovation is improvement. What necessitates innovation one may ask? When the existing structure is no longer yielding the desired results, innovation is needed. In the field of education, there has been a number of innovations. For example, changing from the 6-5-4 system of Education to the 6-3-3-4 system, the change from one short examination for promotion from one school level to the next higher level to the use of continuous assessment, the change from teaching Latin language to teaching French language in schools, the change from English language to mother tongue/language of the immediate environment as medium of instruction in primaries 1-3, etc.

The recognition that desired results are not being realized is a starting point of innovation but equally necessary is the idea of HOW the desired results could be realized. This is followed by developing strategies on how to get desired results. The strategies are put into practice and evaluated for fitness. If it proves itself, it is adopted. This is innovation. So, there must be a change to bring about innovation. But this change must first be tested (tried out) in a small scale to ascertain its’ credibility otherwise it may turn out to be a failure and a colossal loss. It must also be noted that implementing an innovation requires resources and competent personnel.

The issue in innovation is not simply the need for change, but the need for a change that will have a significant positive impact on the system. For an educational innovation to have impact it must be grounded in confirmed teaching and learning theories and pedagogical practices. Such innovation must also be regularly assessed for effectiveness in achieving its’ stated objectives.

Culture

Culture refers to the social behaviours such as Language, Norms, Values, Artifacts, beliefs and Cognitive elements of a particular people or society. Okpokunu, (2002) explained that the best way to discern the boundary between what is culture and what is not culture is to see the world as being made up of two categories of facts, God creation and man creation. What God created is nature while what man created is culture. Therefore, culture is the way of life of a people. Despite the varying definitions of culture, Sociologists and Anthropologists are in agreement on the basic characteristics of culture (Okpokunu; 2002). This includes the following:

- a. Culture is integrated. This means the components of culture complement one another to form a systemic whole.
- b. Culture is dynamic. That is, culture is always in the process of modification.
- c. Culture is shared. Meaning culture is not an exclusive preserve of an individual but a group property.

d. Culture is learned. This means we are not born with culture rather we acquire it in this world through the process of socialization or enculturation.

e. Culture is both material and non-material. It means some components of culture are physical, visible and tangible while others are not but only exist in the human mind.

It suffices therefore to say that culture entails all the unique characteristics and interest of a group of people.

Education

The concept, education has been variously defined by different authors. It may not be possible to give a universally acceptable definition of education because its definition depends on the author's perception of life and his social-political and cultural environment. As a result the meaning of education varies from one society to another. Fafunwa (2002) synthesized the content of education in different societies. He observed that what constituted education various from mental and physical training in Greek, oratorical and military training for the Romans, hunting and training for war in the old African society, and so on. What is evident in this synthesis is that education involves some forms of training and learning that are culture based. This may take place in an organized setting such as a school or in an informal or non-formal environment.

In explaining the meaning of education, Kanu (2006) opined that education is more than schooling and its' associated activities of reading and writing. He sees education to include activities, processes and behaviours by which knowledge, skills, attitudes, customs, mindsets and other values of a people, which are considered as the acceptable way of life at a given point in history, are transmitted from one generation to another. It can be inferred from the foregoing that education is both time and culture based. So, every society, whether simple or complex has its own meaning and means of education, which is the education system. In the words of Nwagu (2002; 7) "the system has the dynamic features of a living organism, and therefore it is sensitive to time and place as it is to environmental conditions". In the context of this lecture, education is delimited to processes of developing the abilities of the mind to learn under the guidance of educators in a formal setting and it affects thinking, feelings and capabilities.

Every education system has defined goals and methods which are time bound. The goals of the Nigerian education system has metamorphosed from production of Catechists, Interpreters and Lower Cadre Workers in the colonial era to producing morally sound patriotic and effective citizens empowered with appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to live in and contribute positively to the society. The document that defines the philosophy and goals of education in Nigeria is the National Policy on Education (NPE). This document has been revised severally, 2013 version being the 6th edition. The revisions were informed by changing goals of education in keeping with the changing needs of the society with changing time (Federal Republic of Nigeria, NPE; 2013). Therefore education prepares the citizenry for effective functioning in the society. The educational provisions in a society must be based on the needs of the society otherwise it becomes dysfunctional.

National Integration

Integration is a process of combining, mixing or bringing together different parts to form a whole. National integration refers to national unity. This is a process of pulling together human, cultural, religious and material resources from different parts of a nation to achieve oneness in

different spheres in the nation. It is geared towards achieving peace, prosperity and happiness in the citizenry irrespective of differences in creed, language, religion or region. The National Integration in India (2016; 1) puts it more clearly as “the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country”. So, this is National Integration, if despite difference in culture, region, religion, sex, class, etc, the people of a Nation still recognize the fact that they are one. Bringing people of diversity together in a common endeavour help them to work together to build systems that enhances their progress and prosperity.

National Integration creates a feeling of unity and solidarity. It fosters a sense of common citizenship. Where there is National Integration, every citizen respects the moral rights of other citizens. The people have the opportunity to live together in peace and prosperity. It implies all people are equal regardless of their tribe, tongue, sex, class, religion or region. National Integration helps to protect the freedom and fundamental rights of the people. National Integration discourages discrimination of all kinds.

Interaction between innovation, Culture and Education

Education is a process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next. It is also a vehicle for cultural transformation and change using innovation as a tool. The three terms are interrelated and interwoven and as such inseparable. It can be explained thus:

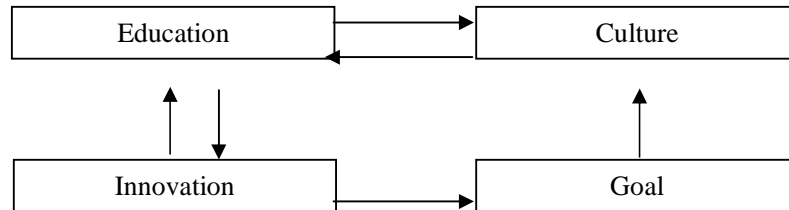


Fig. 1: Innovation, Culture and Education Interaction

Society is dynamic with change as the only constant. Innovations are needed in every aspect of the education system of a nation, be it administration, curriculum content, methods, materials, mode of certification, mode of assessment, system of education or education framework, etc. For example, the innovation of information and communication technology in education today has given us a leap over previous limitation of space and time in today’s teaching and learning. This has impacted on our style of teaching and learning. Learning is now less painful and cumbersome; tasks have been made easier and pleasurable. No more long hours in the library searching for materials and information. With the Android phone, one can access virtual libraries in the comfort of the home or classroom. Teaching and assessment can be done through WhatsApp and e-mail.

Innovation impacts on culture, which gives a bust to education. when education becomes inadequate for the time, innovation is again needed. It is an unending process. If there are no innovations for education to catch up with societal changes, then, the products of education will be a mismatch for the society. They will not only be unable to contribute to development of the society but will also destroy existing societal norms and values.

Elements of National Integration Efforts in Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (NPE; 2013: 1) states that “education is an instrument for national development and social change” and “education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria”. What is a united Nigeria? This is a Nigeria where National integration is operational. What is social change? Social change implies Innovation. Sincerely, innovation, culture and education are essentials for national integration.

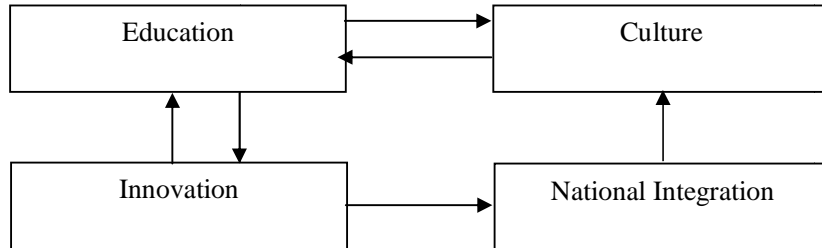


Fig. 2: Innovation, Culture and Education on National Integration

Much has been done in the past to foster National Integration in Nigeria. Evidence abounds in the literature.

i Nigerian Constitution



The constitution emphasizes:

- Democracy: Rule by the people through elected representation.
- Secularism: Separation between religion and governance.
- Social Equality: Equal welfare benefits for all citizens.
- Fundamental Human Rights: Rights embedded in the laws of the land to prevent conflict uncivil behaviour.

ii. National Festivals



- **Independence Day**



Democracy Day

iii. National Symbols



National Map



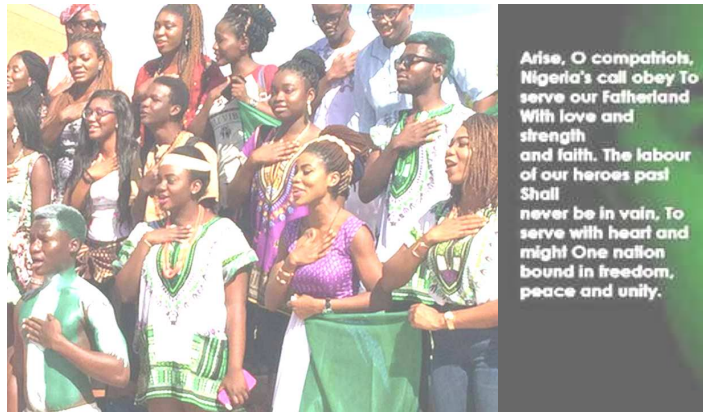
National Flag



THE NIGERIAN COAT OF ARM



National Emblem



Nigerians taking National Anthem

All of these, reminds us of our common Nationality.

However, it does appear that some of the gains of the past rather than being expanded and consolidated are speedily being eroded. Now, can you sincerely profess a feeling of unity and solidarity in any part of Nigeria you find yourself? Can you confidently say, your fundamental rights are respected and you will find peace and prosperity in any part of Nigeria? The obvious answers are No. Then, there is a problem.

Innovation, Culture and Education for National Integration

All learning takes place within the needs of the society and these needs are determined within the culture of the people. Changes in culture create new needs and aspirations which are propelled by education. Education through organized systems provides opportunities for peaceful interaction of learners from different ethnic groups and different social-economic backgrounds. This helps to promote cultural harmony and tolerance. It will be worthwhile to examine the following issues to determine the extent to which they promote or mar national integration in Nigeria.

1. **The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).**



After the Nigeria civil war of 1967, there was a need to correct the damages done by the war. This ushered in the innovation of the NYSC. The NYSC scheme (a one year national service of every Nigerian graduate) was established by decree No 24 of 22nd May 1973 (Now Decree 51 of 16th June, 1993). It was established with a view to encourage and promote development of common ties among Nigerian youths in order to enhance national unity. Specifically, it was established “to emphasize the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of Nigerians irrespective of cultural or social background” (NYSC, 2018). This scheme worked very well in the past. Usually youths are posted outside their states of origin for NYSC. This offered corps members opportunities to interact with themselves as Nigerian from different states and with members of the local communities. There was tolerance and acceptance to the extent that some people settled in their states of NYSC through business, employment or marriage.

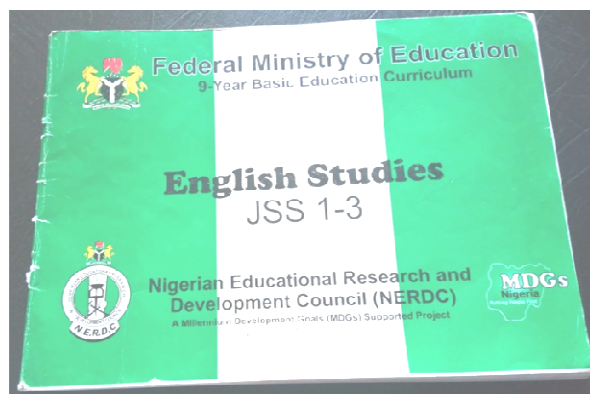
Recent happenings around us are prompting the question of “why NYSC?” The fact that some persons now prefer to fake NYSC discharge certificate rather than participating in the scheme put a common on the potency of the scheme in achieving its mandate. Today corps members have become so vulnerable to insecurity. There are cases of corps members killed in their states of primary assignment as a result of religious riot or ethnic crisis.

Today, most corps members are left to secure accommodation for themselves during the period of service. This exposes them to danger. On account of these problems, if NYSC is made optional, many parents will advise their children to opt out.

I like to put on note that NYSC is still a viable means of National integration if:

- i. the Federal government put structures in place for the security of lives and properties of corps members throughout the service year.
- ii. accommodation for corps members should compulsorily be provided by authorities of their places of primary assignments.

2. **The National Curriculum Guide**



At the 44th session of the International Conference on Education in 1994, peace education was declared as one of the tools for redressing the ills of violence, racism, xenophobia, aggressive nationalism and violation of human rights. This was endorsed by the General Conference of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) at its twenty-eight session in 1995. Peace education entails the processes of developing the attitude, behaviour and skills and acquiring the knowledge and values to live in peace with oneself, others and the natural environment.

National integration can be achieved through the infusion of peace education which is a promising innovation into the National Curriculum Guide. As a medium of education, the national curriculum guide can be used to propagate a culture of peace and non-violence in the classroom by teaching learners to understand their differences and the need to tolerate and respect the culture and interest of one another. According to UNESCO (1995:10):

Proposals for educational change find their natural place in schools and classrooms. Teaching and learning methods, forms of action and institutional policies lines, have to make peace, human rights and democracy both a matter of daily practice and something that is learned. With regards to methods, the use of active methods, group work, the discussion of moral issues and personalized teaching should be encouraged.

This is already in practice in Social Studies and a few other disciplines. It can also find a place in all other disciplines. In Mathematics Education for example, peace education can find a place in the topic Set Theory – union and intersection of sets.

3. **The Language Policy**

The National Policy on Education in the first five editions prescribed any one of the languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school certificate level. Also in primaries 1-3, the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment should be used as medium of instruction while English language is a school subject. In primaries 4-6, the medium of instruction should be English language while the Mother Tongue or language of immediate environment becomes a school subject. The purpose of these innovations was to inspire

national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, colour, ethnic and socio-economic background.

This policy did not flourish as expected. A basic problem that hampered its implementation was the acute shortage of teachers, teaching and learning materials in these subjects. In the sixth edition (2013) of the NPE, the study of Nigerian languages is limited to the Basic levels of Education. Every child is expected to offer one Nigerian language at this level. This will promote national integration since no particular language but Nigerian language is mentioned. The sentiment that the national curriculum recognizes only a few languages to the detriment of others does not arise. But how many Primary and Junior Secondary Schools offer a Nigerian language? How many candidates enroll for a Nigerian language in Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination or Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination (JSSCE)? Are Nigerian languages prominent in the school Time – Table? These are issues that need to be properly resolved for this innovation to be fruitful and have a positive impact on our culture. For this policy to be fully implemented, certain things must be put in place.

- Enough periods in the school Time-Table just like other subjects.
- Availability of teaching and learning materials
- Adequate number of teachers
- Examined at 1st School Leaving Certificate Examination and JSSCE

4. **General Study Courses in Nigerian Universities**

General Study (GST) courses are courses offered by all students in Nigerian Universities irrespective of discipline. These courses were introduced into the Universities in 1977 with the aim of producing graduates who are well knowledgeable, skilled and entrepreneur conscious.

In particular, the GST courses titled Nigerian People and Culture is focused on developing the learner in the Nigerian socio-cultural context. It covers such issues as ethnic interdependence, cultural diversity, consideration of values, lifestyles as well as traditions of various ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is also concerned with social justice, moral and political rights of citizens, religion and the dynamics of the society. This has no doubt helped learners to understand and appreciate the culture of one another thereby promoting unity and solidarity.

5. **Admission into Nigerian Universities and other Tertiary Institutions.**

Admission into Nigerian public universities is getting harder by the year even for candidates who possess the required qualifications, pass the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) Examinations and the newly introduced Post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examinations (UTME). Apart from the small percentage ascribed to merit, admission criteria are unclear. This has resulted in fake admissions and admission racketeering which negates the principles of national integration. Post UTME is a well come innovation, which can enhance national integration if properly applied. Admission criteria should be uniform across Universities without such sentiments as catchment areas or educationally disadvantaged states. It is okay for candidates to write post UTME in the Universities of their first and second choice. Universities should publicly declare the cutoff marks for different disciplines which should be informed by the score of 50% of the number of candidates to be admitted into a discipline. Opportunity is then provided for candidates to make change of course to areas of interest where their aggregate score can take them. The next 50% admission is done on the basis of

first come, first service. By this, candidates can gain admission based on merit and interest in any part of the country without paying for it or going through a middle man.

Admission into all other tertiary institutions such as Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, School of Nursing, etc, should follow this same procedure. This will not only promote national integration but also encourage hard work among admission seekers. The issues of “I did not get admission because I do not know somebody” or “I did not get admission because I did not have money to buy it” will not arise.

6. Admission into Unity Schools or Federal Government Colleges

The Federal Government of Nigeria established Federal Government Colleges otherwise known as “Unity Schools” as a means of fostering national unity through the interaction of pupils from different parts of the country. This is an excellent innovation. At present, 104 Unity Schools exist in Nigeria. This is the admission criteria.

- 30% - Merit irrespective of state of origin
- 30% - Host state
- 30% - other states
- 10% - exigency

What this criteria translate to in terms of cutoff marks for candidates from different states is very annoying. How am I expected to feel if I require 67 points for admission because am from state A where another person from state B requires 04 points for the same admission? Happy? Of course not. I believe in the words of OJo (2009; 1) that in an integrated system “the distribution of power, privileges and liabilities must follow commonly agreed principles both in form and in intent”. Definitely admission criteria for Nigerian Unity Schools do not enjoy agreement of concerned Nigerians.

I completely agree with Okon et al (2013) who rightly observed that we can achieve national integration if we play down on such issues as federal character, state of origin syndrome, quota system and the likes. We must put in place criteria that are fair to all. I am advocating the criteria of MERIT. A common cutoff mark should be used for all applicants. Those who meet the cutoff mark should be admitted while those who do not meet the cutoff should look elsewhere for admission. We cannot all attend Unity Schools.

7. National Symbols

Since National Symbols like the National Map, the National Flag and the National Emblem reminds us of our common nationality, I stand to recommend that we brand ourselves with them. We should popularize them by wearing them as badges, Neck Ties, Head Ties, Hand Bands, decorations for Cars, Offices, School Halls, Auditoria, Classrooms, City Centres, Street Entrances and so on. This will help us to always and everywhere in Nigeria acknowledge our common identity.

Conclusion

Any form of education be it Mathematics Education, Adult Education or Economics Education must minister to the needs and aspirations of the society in which it is administered. We are gathered here for the 17th Annual Conference of NARD to brainstorm and resolve how innovation, culture and education in our various disciplines can bring about national integration in Nigeria. It is my prayer that conferees will be able to do justice to that.

However, we need to be very conscious of the fact that, cooperative behaviours, peace and harmony cannot be possible in a society if certain sections of the society feel marginalized or are actually marginalized by the rest of the society or by some groups. We must therefore be careful not to use innovative educational policies to legitimate the dominance of some sections of the country over others.

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