

INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATIONS: IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN CHILD

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the instructional innovations practised in Nigeria, in relation to the challenges of the education of the 21st century Nigerian child. It is concluded that blind adoption of innovations in disregard to our peculiar circumstances would harm the Country's educational system and make the expectations of the 21st century a mirage. A cautious approach is therefore advocated.

INTRODUCTION:

According to Halford, (1994:14) most people expect something "dramatic, even cataclysmic, happening to coincide with the beginning of the 21st Century". No doubt, this concluding part of the 20th Century has generated a condition of expectancy and the real end i.e. the year 2000 taken for a deadline for United Nations programmes for change. Hence, the slogans "Education for all by the year 2000, Health for all by the year 2000", etc.

Bui as Halford, (1994) further states, some trend analysts and futurists foresee some problems ahead. According to him: *They are cautious, practical people, who try to analyse the future without grinding ideological axes. They try to avoid sensationalism.*

In this regard, one can state that the problems of meeting the great expectations of the 21st Century have some implications and challenges for Education. It is in this direction that this paper tends to look at the instructional innovations practised in Nigeria, in line with its implications and challenges for the education of the 21st Century Nigerian child,

INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATIONS:

Instructional innovations can be defined as the inventions or changes in the process of organisation and presentation of learning materials, towards the improvement of the teaching and learning process. Farant.(1980:45) listed the reasons for innovations in education as follows:

1. to make education relevant to the needs of the Learner,
2. to improve on education in line with social changes,
3. to attune education to the unique system of each country - i.e. values, culture, community involvement, etc..

It is not a secret that all the above also applies to institutional innovations, with the only addition being to improve on the academic performance of students and effective communication between the teacher and the student. Some instructional innovations commonly practised in Nigeria are as follows:

1. *Apprenticeship*: This mostly applies in the area of vocational education in which a person learns a job by practising under experienced person (s). Nigeria is currently practising this innovation, under the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Apprenticeship scheme and the students Industrial Work Experiences Scheme (SIWES) under the Industrial Training Fund (I.T.F). These have enabled students to acquire skills on the job.
2. *Continuous Assessment*: This is an instructional innovation whereby a student's progress is assessed by using scores in class assignments, quizzes and tests together with examination scores. In Nigeria, in most cases, continuous assessment carries 40% and examination 60%. In this regard, teachers are supposed to determine the areas of weaknesses and to remedy them in future instruction.
3. *Educational Games and Simulations*: Many educational games and simulations are currently in use in Nigeria. These are for example, draught, chess, ludo, monopoly, scrabble, etc. Such games and simulations as these are used through instruction to give students experiences they are likely to encounter in real life. without exposing them to dangers, that may result if practised in real life. Games and simulation are reward oriented.
4. *Distance Learning*: This is mostly found in instructions given "beyond the walls of schools to widely

scattered learners" (Coombs, 1985:130). In this case, Coombs continued, there is engagement of multi media approach through radio, print materials correspondence, and audio-visuals. Modular Instruction is used in these cases in which course contents are divided into self-packaged units, making it possible for each unit to be studied alone or in conjunction with others. In Nigeria, the National Teachers' Institute (N.T.I.), University of Abuja, Correspondence Colleges, etc, are known to have used this innovation.

5. *Team Teaching*; This is an innovation whereby a group of teachers teach a group of students, depending on the disposition of the topics, norms of the students, teaching aids and the competence of the educators. The entire team, in this case, is involved in making the teaching plan. Team teaching is mostly practised in Nigeria at the post primary and tertiary levels of our educational system.
Traditional Oriented Instruction: According to Coombs, (1985:129) communication experts, in the 70s found traditional forms of instruction, through puppet show, folk drama, ballads, etc, which were found to be inexpensive and were familiar and acceptable to the traditional communities; and were also found effective in passing the intended message to the understanding of the local populace in such areas as primary health care, nutrition education, family planning, etc. Nigeria is no exception in this case.
7. *Educational Broadcasting*: This is a kind of innovation in which instruction is delivered by radio or television. Most state Ministries of Education have Educational Technology Units that occasionally package material for broadcasting. The Federal Government has also established an Educational Technology (ETC) at Kaduna which also does same, using the Nigerian Television Authority and Radio Nigeria,
8. *Computer Assisted Instruction*: Sprinthall and Sprinthall (1987:257) states that "the advent of micro computer, Computer Assisted Instruction has proved to be an important teaching adjunct", Computer education is presently making some waves in the country. Almost every street in our major cities has one computer centre or the other. But as Sprinthall and Sprinthall warned, the computer "can never replace the teacher".

Problems of Instructional Innovations in Nigeria

Coombs (1985:128) reported that an evaluation study carried out by the Paris based International Planning (HEP.) found problems of most instructional innovations to emanate from:

1. poor Planning - rushing into operation without adequate preparation.
2. lavish spending on hardware instead of concentrating on the production of good and appropriate software.
3. lack of consultation with field operators and in addition to insufficient training and lack of feedback system to programme producers.

Similarly, Farant, (1980:57) posited that innovations in education experience obstacles resulting from geographical, historical, economic, logistics, and personal factors.

It is not a secret that instructional innovations in Nigeria suffer all the above problems as enumerated by Coombs and Farant. Specifically, Coombs observed that the I.I.E.P. report found problems with Nigerimi Pilo! Television schools in the mid-60s. The problems identified were mechanical and Logistically based, resulting from device breakdowns and voltage fluctuation, sketchy postal systems that could not deliver programme schedules, and the lack of repair and maintenance of gadgets. The report, Coombs further noted observed that the television used was inappropriate at that time and that the radio would have been more effective, less costly and less difficult to manage. But with the developmental level of the country today, one can slate that television educational broadcasting is appropriate if well handled.

Like Farant observed, there are also such geographical factors as distance, poor climatic conditions, and difficult terrains constituting obstacles to such innovations as the apprenticeship, distance learning, and educational broadcasting. In the same vein there are also such historical factors as the colonial influence, imposition of alien curriculum and natural resistance to change evidently affect most institutional innovations in the country. These have affected such innovations as continuous assessment, distance learning, educational broadcasting, and computer assisted instruction. There are many critics in these directions.

Another important factor observed by Farant to impede instructional innovations, and which is relevant to the Nigerian case is financial problems. Most instructional innovations are not well funded. In some cases where funds are provided, they are often mismanaged or misdirected or embezzled. For several years, educational budget has been relatively high in this country. But one wonders why not much has been achieved. Additionally some educational instructional aids are so costly that they are beyond the reach of the end users. A good example is the computer.

Instructional innovation, in Nigeria, in line with the position of Farant are also bedevilled with logistic problems. For instance, there are late delivery of material, lack of trained manpower, consultation, sufficient material and planning, respectively, for the instructional innovations being practised in the country. Good instances are found in distance learning, continuous assessment educational broadcasting, etc.

Farant, (1990:57) also noted that there are personal problems such as "insufficient rewards, persons in key roles unsympathetic to the change, key persons not fall) understanding the programme and personality conflicts" affecting innovations. The Nigerian education system is not an exception in these problems, as no instructional innovation can be ruled out in these regards.

Several solutions have been posited by experts as Farant (1980), Coombs (1985), and Worell and Stilwell (1987) toward successful innovations. these includes:

1. starting with simple instruction innovations that will not create problems,
2. investment in the production of good quality software which is cheaper instead of costly sophisticated hardware,
3. innovations should not be used to enrich old curriculum instead it should aim at improving "on old curriculum and" a fundamental reordering of the whole teaching/learning system and process" (Coombs 1985:129).
4. participation in planning of all concerned,
5. proper orientation in planning of all concerned.
6. using clearly stated realistic objectives and measures of achieving same,

Implications and Challenges for the Twenty-first Century:

Oliverira, (1982) noted that the current innovations in educational technologies present difficult tasks to the 'planners of "the generation who will be living in the 21st Century". But complex problems, he observed, cannot be made simple by mere use of sophisticated technologies. In his view, Coombs (1985) states that the distance between educational systems and social changes is still on the increase, and will continue to do so in spite of strong corrective measures. He opined that the problems created from innovations have no single solution, but depend on the peculiarities of each case, nor can they be remedied by changes in existing objectives, curricula, teacher training, salary improvement and educational technologies of formal educational systems. Most and unmet learning needs, he further emphasised, have to do with people beyond the present reach of the schools - such as the long-neglected handicapped and disabled, unemployed skilled and unskilled workers, overburdened teachers and managers on whom the society relies on for solutions to the definable but peculiar problems, and opportunities of the 21st Century. To him, it would be miraculous to suppose that these educational deficits can be dispensed with by the year 2000.

Halford, (1994:16) in a word of advice for this generation, in their pursuance of the demands of the 21st century, has this to say: *A generation that sees itself with nothing to lose might opt for a more structured and disciplined world order - where survival, not maintenance of the status quo (which is increasingly difficult to maintain), becomes the top priority, As the more apparent, solutions and programmes we now consider unacceptable may seem more and more reasonable.*

All these calls for caution in our educational innovations towards the expectancies of the 21st Century. Definitely as Dappa, (1994: 18) observed, "it would be sheer madness for poor nations¹¹ Like Nigeria to compete with the advanced educational systems of the developed world. Rather, as Dappa further stated, the country should aspire to foster self-reliance to the extent of local resources in her educational system in the pursuit of the expectancies of the 21st Century. In this regard, the Country should adopt instructional innovations that:

1. fosters problems - solving,
2. is not ahead of our development, but based on our peculiarities,
3. utilises easily and affordable materials,
4. involves its operators at the planning stage,
5. introduces novelty into the teaching - learning process,
6. has realistic and well defined objectives,

However, the Country should also strive to invest in hardware, such as the computer which is currently making some waves in the country. Many institutions, both public and private, now offer various computer courses. These should be harnessed and consolidated,

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the shortcoming of instructional innovations in the country's educational system, they have made a headway contributing to the upliftment of educational standards. In this regard, educational innovations, today has various materials and methods that has simplified the teaching - learning process.

Borrowing the words of Coombs, (1995:134), it would be convenient to state that education in our present day has at its disposal variety and tools to work with, only if they are effectively utilized and at affordable manner, with corrections being guided by past experiences. Like this, it is hoped that the Nigerian Educational System would make a smooth leap forward into the 21st Century.

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