THEATRE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Effectiveness of NICO and NCAC Cultural Programmes in Promoting National Integration in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition makes national integration a recurring policy concern, and successive governments have relied on culture as a unifying instrument through agencies such as the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC). This paper examines the effectiveness of NICO and NCAC cultural programmes in promoting national integration in Nigeria. Anchored on Cultural Nationalism Theory, it treats the programmes as the independent variable and national integration, measured through unity, mutual understanding, inter-ethnic coexistence and social cohesion, as the dependent variable. A survey design was adopted, and data from a structured questionnaire administered to 220 staff of the two agencies, complemented by document review, were analysed using frequencies and percentages. The programmes are perceived as contributing positively to national identity, mutual respect and social cohesion, with 83.2% of respondents agreeing that they are effective, but their effectiveness is significantly constrained by inadequate funding, political interference, shortage of trained personnel, poor logistics and weak inter-agency collaboration. The paper concludes that cultural programmes have real but underexploited potential for national integration, and recommends improved funding, stronger monitoring and evaluation, greater inter-agency synergy and sustained public enlightenment.

Keywords: NICO; NCAC; cultural programmes; national integration; cultural policy; Nigeria

1 Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world, home to over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, multiple religious traditions and several hundred languages (Mazrui 118). This diversity, while a source of richness, has also generated persistent challenges of unity, mutual suspicion and fragile national cohesion since the amalgamation of 1914. Culture, understood as the totality of a people's way of life, beliefs, values and shared symbols (Tylor 1; Geertz 5), has long been recognised as a strategic instrument for drawing plural societies into a shared sense of belonging (Balogun and Obosi 58). On this premise, Nigeria adopted a National Cultural Policy, first articulated in 1988 and later revised, which identifies national unity and integration as core objectives of cultural development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Culture 7).

To translate the policy into practice, government established specialised agencies, notably the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), charged with orientating citizens toward positive cultural values and coordinating the promotion, preservation and projection of Nigerian culture as a tool for nation-building (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Cultural Policy 12). Through orientation programmes, festivals such as

the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), exhibitions and public enlightenment campaigns, the agencies are expected to cultivate mutual respect and a shared national identity among Nigerians of different backgrounds (Ogunbiyi 89).

Despite decades of policy commitment and institutional presence, Nigeria continues to grapple with ethnic tension, sectional agitation and weak national cohesion, which raises the question of how effective these programmes have been in achieving their integrative purpose. This paper therefore interrogates the effectiveness of NICO and NCAC cultural programmes in promoting national integration in Nigeria. It examines the extent of policy implementation by the two agencies, their role in fostering unity, the effectiveness of their specific programmes, and the challenges that constrain their integrative impact.

2 Conceptual framework

2.1 Concepts of culture, cultural policy and cultural programmes

Culture has been variously defined across disciplines. Tylor describes it as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1). Geertz conceives it as a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms (5), while Durkheim emphasises shared collective representations that bind individuals into a cohesive social whole (38). For this study, culture is the shared values, symbols, practices and worldview of a people, which can be deliberately mobilised through institutional programmes to shape collective identity and unity.

Cultural policy refers to the government principles, guidelines and actions directed at the preservation, promotion and management of a nation's cultural resources (Williams 87). Nigeria's National Cultural Policy frames culture as an instrument of national development and unity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Cultural Policy 3). Cultural programmes are the concrete, time-bound activities, such as festivals, exhibitions, orientation courses and enlightenment campaigns, through which policy objectives are operationalised. NICO inculcates positive cultural values and national consciousness, while NCAC preserves, promotes and projects Nigeria's arts and culture and coordinates NAFEST, an annual event that brings together the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Cultural Policy 12). Both agencies are the principal platforms through which the integrative aspirations of the policy are meant to be realised.

NICO was established to inculcate positive cultural values and desirable social orientation in Nigerian citizens, using culture as a vehicle for attitudinal re-engineering and national consciousness. NCAC is mandated to preserve, promote and project Nigeria's arts and culture, and is best known for coordinating NAFEST, an annual event that brings together the thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory in a shared celebration of cultural diversity (Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Cultural Policy 12). Both agencies are the principal institutional platforms through which the integrative aspirations of the policy are meant to be realised at the grassroots and national levels.

2.2 Culture, nation-building and national integration

Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community", bound together by shared symbols and narratives, underscores the potential of culture to construct a collective national consciousness (6). Smith argues that national identity depends on shared myths, memories, symbols and traditions that a community continually reproduces (23), and Turner suggests that shared cultural events

generate "communitas", a temporary but powerful experience of unity across social divisions (96). National integration is the process through which diverse groups come to share a common national identity, transcending ethnic, religious and regional loyalties without necessarily erasing them (Smith 25). In Nigeria it remains an unfinished project, negotiated through political, educational and cultural instruments, of which the programmes of NICO and NCAC are one important, though under-examined, strand.

2.3 Empirical review

Adejumo investigated the contribution of national cultural festivals to unity through a qualitative case study and found that festivals create valuable spaces of inter-ethnic interaction, although their long-term impact is undermined by irregular funding and weak follow-up programming (41). Akinwale used document analysis and interviews and found that implementation structures exist but are limited by weak coordination between agencies and inconsistent government support (15). Ben-Iheanacho found that the policy provides a strong framework for unity but is implemented inconsistently because of inadequate funding, weak coordination and limited community participation (Ben-Iheanacho). None of these studies assessed specific programmes empirically.

Egbonu found that the policy rhetorically promotes intercultural understanding while practical implementation remains limited and uneven. Salifu and Faidi found that weak coordination between cultural institutions limits both cultural diplomacy and the nation-building potential of the creative industries, and Timi-Ekubo observed that resource and coordination constraints limit measurable integrative outcomes. Yusuf found that the agencies retain considerable public goodwill but are constrained by inadequate funding and manpower shortages, and Obasi noted that inter-agency collaboration remains weak despite shared integrative mandates.

Collectively, these studies confirm that the cultural policy has genuine integrative potential but is constrained by funding, coordination and institutional capacity. Most adopt a broad policy-level focus or a single-programme case-study approach, without a direct empirical assessment of NICO and NCAC programme effectiveness from the perspective of the staff who implement them. This is the gap the present study addresses.

2.4 Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Cultural Nationalism Theory, associated with Johann Gottfried Herder, who argued that the nation is a cultural community bound together by shared language, folklore, customs and historical memory rather than by political boundaries alone (Herder 44). A people's collective spirit, or Volksgeist, is expressed through its cultural life, which makes the deliberate cultivation of shared culture a legitimate instrument of cohesion (47). Smith builds on this tradition by arguing that modern nations sustain themselves through the continuous reproduction of shared symbols, myths and practices, with cultural institutions as central agents of identity formation (64). The theory explains why Nigeria has invested in NICO and NCAC, and it points to the mechanisms (festivals, orientation programmes and public enlightenment) examined here.

The theory has limitations. Gellner criticises it for underestimating the role of political and economic processes in constructing modern nations (55), which suggests that cultural programmes alone are unlikely to secure integration without complementary political and economic measures. The theory nonetheless remains relevant because it explains the logic of the mandate of NICO and NCAC and provides a framework for interpreting how far their programmes have succeeded.

3 Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which allows systematic collection of data from a defined population to describe existing conditions, attitudes and practices without manipulating any variable. The Taro Yamane formula was applied at a 5% margin of error, yielding a usable sample of 220 respondents, and stratified random sampling ensured proportionate representation across the two agencies and departmental cadres, after which respondents within each stratum were selected by simple random sampling.

Primary data were generated through a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), covering socio-demographic characteristics, policy implementation, the role of the agencies in fostering unity, the effectiveness of specific programmes and the challenges facing the agencies. It was complemented by a review of institutional and policy documents. Data were analysed using frequencies and simple percentages, with Strongly Agree and Agree combined to indicate agreement and Strongly Disagree and Disagree combined to indicate disagreement.

4 Data presentation and analysis

All 220 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and found usable, a response rate of 100%. The analysis begins with the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and then follows the specific objectives of the study. Percentages are calculated on 220 respondents and shown in brackets.

4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	94 (42.7)
	Female	122 (55.5)
	No Response	4 (1.8)
Age Bracket	18–27 years	13 (5.9)
	28–37 years	10 (4.5)
	38–47 years	74 (33.6)
	48 years and above	119 (54.1)
	No Response	4 (1.8)
Educational Qualification	ND/NCE	7 (3.2)
	HND/Bachelor's Degree	100 (45.5)
	Master's Degree	83 (37.7)
	Ph.D.	23 (10.5)
	Others	3 (1.4)
	No Response	4 (1.8)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Organisation	NICO	154 (70.0)
	NCAC	45 (20.5)
	No Response	21 (9.5)
Years of Service	Less than 5 years	32 (14.5)
	5–10 years	27 (12.3)
	11–15 years	55 (25.0)
	Above 15 years	95 (43.2)
	No Response	11 (5.0)

Source: Field survey, 2026.

Table 1 shows that female respondents (55.5%) outnumbered male respondents (42.7%), that 54.1% were aged 48 years and above, that 45.5% held a Bachelor's degree or its equivalent and 37.7% a Master's degree, and that 43.2% had served for more than 15 years. NICO staff made up 70.0% of respondents and NCAC staff 20.5%. This means that the respondents are mature, well-educated and experienced officers who are well placed to assess the programmes of their agencies.

4.2 Extent of implementation of the National Cultural Policy by NICO and NCAC

Table 2 presents the extent of implementation of the National Cultural Policy.

Table 2. Extent of implementation of the National Cultural Policy.

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
1	The National Cultural Policy is adequately implemented by my agency.	48 (21.8)	103 (46.8)	24 (10.9)	34 (15.5)	6 (2.7)	5 (2.3)
2	The objectives of the Cultural Policy are well understood by staff of my agency.	52 (23.6)	103 (46.8)	26 (11.8)	28 (12.7)	6 (2.7)	5 (2.3)
3	My agency regularly carries out cultural programmes as stipulated in the policy.	92 (41.8)	96 (43.6)	6 (2.7)	21 (9.5)	1 (0.5)	4 (1.8)
4	There is sufficient government commitment to the implementation of the Cultural Policy.	32 (14.5)	63 (28.6)	42 (19.1)	61 (27.7)	17 (7.7)	5 (2.3)
5	Implementation of the policy by my agency has contributed to national integration.	39 (17.7)	114 (51.8)	28 (12.7)	16 (7.3)	18 (8.2)	5 (2.3)
6	Cultural programmes of my agency are monitored and evaluated regularly.	28 (12.7)	65 (29.5)	39 (17.7)	46 (20.9)	32 (14.5)	10 (4.5)

Source: Field survey, 2026. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; U = undecided; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree; NR = no response.

Table 2 shows that 68.6% of respondents agreed that the National Cultural Policy is adequately implemented by their agency, 70.5% that its objectives are well understood, 85.5% that their agency regularly carries out the stipulated programmes and 69.5% that implementation has contributed to national integration. Agreement was lower on government commitment (43.2%) and on regular monitoring and evaluation (42.3%), each disputed by 35.5%. This means that the agencies are active implementers, but the depth of implementation depends on government support and on evaluation

systems that remain weak. The finding is consistent with Akinwale, who found that implementation is limited by inconsistent government support, and with Ben-Iheanacho, who found that it is inconsistent despite a strong policy framework.

4.3 Role of NICO and NCAC in fostering national unity

Table 3 presents the role of NICO and NCAC in fostering national unity.

Table 3. Role of NICO and NCAC in fostering national unity.

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
1	My agency organises programmes that promote peaceful coexistence among ethnic groups.	98 (44.5)	105 (47.7)	2 (0.9)	8 (3.6)	2 (0.9)	5 (2.3)
2	Cultural programmes have improved mutual understanding among Nigerians of different backgrounds.	67 (30.5)	106 (48.2)	24 (10.9)	10 (4.5)	8 (3.6)	5 (2.3)
3	Cultural festivals organised by my agency promote national unity.	112 (50.9)	90 (40.9)	8 (3.6)	2 (0.9)	3 (1.4)	5 (2.3)
4	My agency's activities promote cultural diversity as a source of national strength.	109 (49.5)	93 (42.3)	9 (4.1)	1 (0.5)	3 (1.4)	5 (2.3)
5	Public enlightenment activities of my agency have increased appreciation of Nigeria's diverse cultures.	76 (34.5)	126 (57.3)	11 (5.0)	3 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.8)
6	My agency's activities have reduced ethnic and cultural prejudices among Nigerians.	39 (17.7)	113 (51.4)	38 (17.3)	20 (9.1)	5 (2.3)	5 (2.3)

Source: Field survey, 2026. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; U = undecided; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree; NR = no response.

Table 3 shows that 92.3% of respondents agreed that their agency organises programmes that promote peaceful coexistence and 78.6% that programmes have improved mutual understanding. Agreement stood at 91.8% each for the unifying value of festivals, the promotion of diversity as a source of national strength and the effect of public enlightenment on appreciation of Nigeria's cultures, but fell to 69.1% on the reduction of ethnic and cultural prejudice. This means that the agencies play an active and valued role in fostering unity, and that awareness is easier to achieve than a change in deep-seated attitudes. The finding is in line with Adejumo, who found that festivals create valuable spaces for inter-ethnic interaction, and with Yusuf, who found that the agencies retain considerable public goodwill.

4.4 Effectiveness of NICO and NCAC cultural programmes

Table 4 presents the effectiveness of NICO and NCAC cultural programmes in promoting national integration.

Table 4. Effectiveness of NICO and NCAC cultural programmes in promoting national integration.

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
1	Cultural programmes of NICO and NCAC promote a stronger sense of Nigerian identity.	70 (31.8)	133 (60.5)	9 (4.1)	3 (1.4)	0 (0.0)	5 (2.3)

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
2	These programmes encourage appreciation of Nigeria's cultural diversity.	89 (40.5)	124 (56.4)	2 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (2.3)
3	Participants in these programmes develop greater respect for other ethnic groups.	58 (26.4)	149 (67.7)	7 (3.2)	2 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	4 (1.8)
4	The programmes have strengthened social cohesion among Nigerians.	29 (13.2)	161 (73.2)	13 (5.9)	5 (2.3)	7 (3.2)	5 (2.3)
5	The programmes reach a wide cross-section of the Nigerian population.	21 (9.5)	112 (50.9)	39 (17.7)	31 (14.1)	12 (5.5)	5 (2.3)
6	Overall, the cultural programmes of NICO and NCAC are effective in promoting national integration.	54 (24.5)	129 (58.6)	16 (7.3)	11 (5.0)	5 (2.3)	5 (2.3)

Source: Field survey, 2026. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; U = undecided; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree; NR = no response.

Table 4 addresses the central concern of the study. Respondents agreed at 92.3% that the programmes promote a stronger sense of Nigerian identity, 96.8% that they encourage appreciation of diversity, 94.1% that participants develop greater respect for other ethnic groups and 86.4% that social cohesion has been strengthened. Reach was the weakest item (60.5% agreed, 19.5% disagreed). Overall, 83.2% agreed that the programmes are effective in promoting national integration. This means that those closest to implementation regard the programmes as effective, while population-wide reach remains a limitation. The finding echoes Adejumo, who found that national festivals have strong integrative potential, and Ben-Iheanacho, who found that the policy has integrative potential if properly managed.

4.5 Challenges confronting NICO and NCAC cultural programmes

Table 5 presents the challenges confronting the effectiveness of cultural programmes.

Table 5. Challenges confronting the effectiveness of cultural programmes.

S/N	Item	SA	A	U	D	SD	NR
1	Inadequate funding limits the effectiveness of my agency's cultural programmes.	153 (69.5)	61 (27.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.5)	5 (2.3)
2	Political interference affects the implementation of cultural programmes.	121 (55.0)	78 (35.5)	8 (3.6)	5 (2.3)	3 (1.4)	5 (2.3)
3	There is a shortage of trained personnel to execute cultural programmes effectively.	66 (30.0)	118 (53.6)	15 (6.8)	14 (6.4)	2 (0.9)	5 (2.3)
4	Poor logistics and infrastructure hinder the reach of cultural programmes.	74 (33.6)	111 (50.5)	15 (6.8)	14 (6.4)	1 (0.5)	5 (2.3)
5	Weak collaboration between NICO, NCAC and other stakeholders limits programme impact.	58 (26.4)	121 (55.0)	22 (10.0)	14 (6.4)	0 (0.0)	5 (2.3)
6	Low public awareness of these agencies' programmes reduces their integrative impact.	63 (28.6)	116 (52.7)	20 (9.1)	16 (7.3)	0 (0.0)	5 (2.3)

Source: Field survey, 2026. SA = strongly agree; A = agree; U = undecided; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree; NR = no response.

Table 5 shows that 97.3% of respondents agreed that inadequate funding limits programme effectiveness, making it the most significant challenge. It was followed by political interference (90.5%), poor logistics and infrastructure (84.1%), shortage of trained personnel (83.6%), and weak collaboration and low public awareness (81.4% each). This means that the constraints are mainly structural and resource-related rather than weaknesses in the programmes themselves. The finding agrees with Yusuf, who found that inadequate funding and manpower shortages constrain programme delivery, and with Obasi, who found that inter-agency collaboration remains weak despite shared mandates.

5 Discussion of findings

The findings lend empirical support to the central proposition of Cultural Nationalism Theory: that deliberately organised cultural activity can cultivate shared national identity and cohesion across ethnic lines (Herder 44; Smith 64). The strong endorsement of NICO and NCAC programmes as promoters of identity, diversity appreciation and social cohesion (Table 4) corroborates the theory's assumption that shared symbols and practices can generate the imagined community that underpins integration (Anderson 6; Turner 96), and it is consistent with Akinwale and Adejumo.

At the same time, the challenges in Table 5 validate Gellner's caution that the unifying promise of cultural nationalism cannot be realised through programming alone, without institutional and material support (55). This aligns with Ben-Iheanacho, Salifu, Egbonu and Obasi, who identified funding, coordination and institutional capacity as recurring constraints. The weaker results for monitoring and evaluation (Table 2) and population reach (Table 4) suggest that effectiveness is capped less by the value of the programmes than by the institutional environment in which they are delivered.

6 Summary of findings

Based on the data presented and analysed, the study established the following:

1. NICO and NCAC actively implement the National Cultural Policy, but government commitment and monitoring and evaluation remain comparatively weak.
2. The two agencies play a strong role in fostering national unity, although reducing entrenched ethnic prejudice is more difficult.
3. The programmes are broadly perceived as effective in strengthening identity, diversity appreciation, inter-ethnic respect and cohesion, though their reach is limited.
4. Effectiveness is constrained by inadequate funding, political interference, personnel shortages, poor logistics and weak collaboration.

7 Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of NICO and NCAC cultural programmes in promoting national integration in Nigeria. The staff who implement the programmes perceive them as contributing substantively to national identity, diversity appreciation, inter-ethnic respect and social cohesion, in line with Cultural Nationalism Theory. This potential is not fully realised, however, because inadequate funding, political interference, personnel shortages, poor logistics and weak inter-agency collaboration constrain both the depth and the reach of the programmes. Culture remains a viable but

underutilised tool for national integration in Nigeria, and its promise can be more fully achieved only through deliberate institutional strengthening of the agencies charged with its delivery.

8 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Government should substantially increase and consistently release budgetary allocations to NICO and NCAC, since inadequate funding was the most significant challenge identified.
2. Political interference in appointments and programme delivery should be minimised, with greater administrative autonomy for both agencies.
3. NICO and NCAC should institutionalise regular monitoring and evaluation of their programmes, so that implementation translates measurably into integration outcomes.
4. The two agencies should strengthen formal collaboration with each other, and with state governments, traditional institutions and civil society, to improve coordination and avoid duplication.

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