

**RE-EMPHASISING THE PLACE OF HISTORY IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY IN THE NEXT
MILLENNIUM.**

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**BEING A PAPER PRESENTED DURING THE NATIONAL
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Abstract

A person that is ignorant of his past will likely be a failure now and in the future. Undoubtedly, it is the past that dictates what the present and the future will look like. History as a subject is a viable course because it exposes the recipients to the rich heritage passed across to us by the past generation. The understanding of how the society has grown will leave much for the present generation to do. Having realized the importance of history to men kind the paper looked into the main objectives of teaching history in Nigerian schools and the importance of history to people offering it and the entire society. Some of the problems that are inhibiting the effective teaching of history in Nigerian schools were also highlighted. The concluding part focused on the place of history in the development of Nigeria in the next millennium.

Introduction

For any right-thinking people, the history of the country is usually accorded its rightful place. This is because history is one of the major tools that breeds loyalty, patriotism and respect for the nation into the citizens of that country.

The irrelevant nature of colonial education especially the teaching of British history at the expense of Nigerian History was seriously criticized before 1960. Other subjects that were attached included geography, literature and other foreign based subjects.

These courses were reviewed along with others to reflect the local needs at the curriculum conference held in September, 1969. According to the National Policy on Education (1981 revised), history at least at the secondary school level should include National history, West African history, ancient history and modern world history. Emphasis should however be on National and West African history. (FGN 1969:163). Before considering the objectives of history teaching in Nigerian schools there is the need to look into the meaning of history this will help us to truly know the importance of history to the nations.

What is History?

The word History is derived from the Greek word historic meaning "an inquiry", 'a story', 'an investigation of man's past' (Kykkotis, 1957). History is an organized account of past events collected together through several methods such as written records, oral traditions Archaeology etc.

This is the study of life in society in the past in all its aspects in relation to present development and future hopes. It is the story of man in time, an inquiry into the past based on evidences. It is also an inquiry into what happen in the past, when it happened and how it happened.

History is an inquiry into the inevitable changes in human affairs in the ways these changes affects. Influences or determines the patterns of life in the

society. History is an attempt to re-think the past. The various definitions given above shows that history is more than mere accumulated historical facts meant to be committed to memory and be regurgitated during examinations. The lessons there- in are discovered when the facts are examined and given meaningful interpretations.

Indeed it is a major means of explaining the present life of a group in terms of the events of the past. As the past is considered, the society is being helped to solve her present and future problems.

Analysis of the educational objectives of Teaching History

History is part and parcel of the life of a society and since education has been defined as the transmission of life from the 'living'. To the "living" it follows then, that for the recipients of education to live a meaningful life, history, a life-giving course ought to be made available to them. Hence, the indispensability of history for the survival of the citizens of any nation.

The National educational objectives upon which all other educational objectives rotates are:

- (1) The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity.
- (2) The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
- (3) The training of the mind in the understanding of the around, and
- (4) The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society (FGN. 1981)

As earlier noted, the objectives of teaching history cannot be divulged from these general objectives. History as expressed by the incorporated Association of Assistant masters of secondary schools (IAAMSS) (1950) should be taught to:

- a- initiate children into adult ways:
- b- provide a scope for imagination and understanding
- c- satisfy children's love for stories
- d- train the intellect
- e- inculcate mode of thought
- f- help pupils to form good habits and attitudes of the mind
- g- enable children to understand public affairs
- h- train children/students in citizenship
- i- enable students to develop interest in their local environment and
- j- inculcate into children/students moral values. (IAAMSS, 1950 : 1-

6).

History is also aimed at developing in the recipients the ability to make reasoned judgments and to apply it to situations that they may subsequently meet. In his own submission Crookale (1960) enumerated what should be the objectives of teaching history. According to him history should be taught with the aim:

- 1 of introducing the students to their heritage
- 2 to impart moral values
- 3 to quicken children's imagination,
- 4 to lay the foundation of a tolerant outlook
- 5 to impart a sense of human solidarity
- 6 to train the mind
- 7 to give pleasure and provide a stimulus for students' developing minds (1960 :11-29).

Without missing words, all the objectives stated above truly reveals how important history is to man particularly to a progressive society. Its importance to the growth of a society cannot be over-emphasized.

Importance of history to man

- (a) History as a subject contributes in no small measure to the development of man. For instance at school and even outside it, history helps the recipients to gain insight into the society's development, it allows for knowledge of values and reasoned judgment.
- (b) History helps man to develop specific abilities and aptitudes which will become useful when the facts of history have been forgotten. These abilities and aptitudes include (i) Analytical approach to life (ii) Discrimination between facts and mere opinions, divergent thinking, imaginative thinking and tolerance.
- (c) History is a medium through which the heritage of a group is passed across to those who are coming behind. The transmission of the people's culture is carried out through the teaching of history. For instance the stories of the ancestors, their ways of life, their political, social and economic organization, their taboos, religious beliefs and practices are passed across to the younger ones. All these will definitely help the learners to appreciate the society's cultural values. Learners will also be helped to become aware of the forces that usually make for progress or failure in any age so that in later life they may better organize their lives and avoid the mistakes which may inevitably lead to their down fall (Adeyinka 1991).
- (d) History helps to widen the horizon of students. Their imaginations are quickened and they also develop the ability for critical thinking.
- (e) History helps students to become good citizens. It helps them to become tolerant individuals. The study of selected men and women in history who had remarkable character would help to inculcate in them values that will enable them to develop good character and socially acceptable behaviours.
- (f) Students possess international understanding as the unity of the human race and the inter-dependence of nations and people of the modern world are presented to them. This is being taught through the history and activities of such world bodies as the leagues of Nations, 1919-1945, the United Nations Organization (UNO) from 1946 and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) since 1963.

- (g) The growth of imagination is an important aspect of mental training. This can be achieved through history. Story telling aided by illustrations will help students to see events in their minds as the stories are narrated.
- (h) Since the present has grown out of the past, to understand our contemporary world, history will always pave the way for this. It has consistently made it possible to know the root of the present life of a people.
- (i) The study of history assists man to know much about his own land and the, world. It is possible to know the background of our own country and that of our neighbours. Nigerian history, European history, American history, African history, the introduction of Christianity and Islam to Africa etc. helps us to better understand the world (immediate and remote).
- (j) History prepares students for life within the society and for higher education. This will enable them to serve the society at a higher level. That is, by exposing students to new ideas and topics in history as recommended by major examination bodies, they are prepared for an examination that will qualify them for admission to universities and other tertian/ institutions where they could study for higher degrees that will qualify them for higher responsibilities in the society.

A deep consideration of the importance of history shows that as a subject it ought to be given prominent place in Nigerian schools. The society will be making close to no progress if history is not given enough attention. Unfortunately, the general attitude of our society and particularly our schools towards history as a subject is nothing to write home about.

General attitude of students to History in Nigerians Schools

A case study of Kwara State Secondary Schools

For a long time, very few senior secondary students offered history as a subject. The situation seems not to be addressed at all as the population of those offering it continued to decrease yearly.

Session	School A		School B	
	Total number of student	Those that offered History	Total number of students	Student offered History
1994/95	280	27	204	11
1995/96	361	16	262	07
1996/97	305	15	211	02
1997/98	298	2	199	01
1998/99	240	-	285	3

The table above speaks loud enough to be heard and understood by all. One can see that the population of students offering history which is very much needed for

the survival of Nigerian society has completely gone down. Students are no longer interested in the course which is badly needed for the stability of independent Nigeria. In school A out of the 280 students that registered for senior secondary school certificate Examination in 1995, only 27 offered history and by 1999 out of the 240 students none sat for history. The same picture has been painted in school B. as at 1995 11 students took history out of 204 students. By 1999 out of 285 students that enrolled for Senior Secondary School Examination only 3 took history.

One can simply say that history is already dying a natural death in Nigerian schools and nothing tangible seems to be done about this. The table reflects the situation of history as a subject in most Nigerian secondary schools.

What then could be responsible for the low enrolment in history? The objectives for history teaching at the secondary school level is not made clear enough for the students.

- (1) Most students do not really know the importance of history to them and the entire society. The rationale behind the different historical topics is not too known to the students either. What they know is the needed preparation to pass the 'Almighty' senior secondary school examination.
- (2) Many students have a distaste for history because of its nature. They are not ready to memorise gammount facts and dates which history presents.
- (3) The teaching of history has not been inspiring enough. Most teachers are used to lecture method for the presentation of historical facts. Whereas children tend to learn more and better by doing and they go more into things that interest them. Holding rigidly to chalk and talk method note-giving etc, which are most frequently used in Nigerian school are fast becoming obsolete as we are getting close to the next millennium with emphasis on new discoveries and experimental approach to life.
- (4) Relevant text books and other teaching aids are not within the reach of Nigerian schools. This discourages most students from going in for history.
- (5) The syllabus for senior secondary school history is somehow too wide. This discourages many students from going in for history. Students have to study West African history, ancient history and modern world history.

The place of history in the development of Nigeria in the next Millenium

This paper has looked into the importance of history in the development of man and the entire society. With the lukewarm attitude of Nigerian students towards history as analysed in the table already considered, If Nigerian society will continue to be in touch with its past and if the past is expected to continue to influence the present and the future for better, there is the need to pay urgent attention to the teaching of history in Nigeria schools. All hands must be on deck to have our rich heritage sustained especially as we are entering into a new millennium. The following steps will help Nigerian to have the past boldly printed in the minds of the entire populace through our schools.

- (1) As history is being taught in our schools emphasis should be on our rich heritage which the students are expected to cherish and sustain in the course of their existence in the society.
- (2) Priority should be on our national history as well as the West African history.
- (3) Judging by the crucial role history is expected to play in the life of a society there is no reason why it should not be given a compulsory status up to the senior secondary level. What to be noted is the fact that the two world powers, Japan and America, from where we have borrowed the 6-3-3-4 system of education so much cherished their history that students have to compulsorily offer history uptill the senior secondary level. Nigerian should be ready to borrow a leave from these forward-looking countries.
- (4) The gallant contributions made by notable Nigerians towards our freedom from foreign domination and the evolution of Nigerian society must be thoroughly mastered and appreciated by the younger generation. There is therefore the need to expose students to Nigerian history.
- (5) History teachers in our schools must know and use the most appropriate methods and relevant aids during each lesson. This will arouse the interest of students and stimulate them to study history. For instance, lecture method, note-taking and other dull methods should be minimally adopted. Inspiring methods, like projects, use of source material, imaginative writing, Dramatization and Discussions should be intensified.
- (6) Teachers should also be a citadel of knowledge so as to impart relevant facts into the learners.
- (7) Schools should endeavour to have history room. This is an important resource for history teaching. Some other teaching aids like Tape recorder, Record players, over-head projectors, film strips, slide projector, Television and Radio that will enrich and enhance students interest and understanding should be supplied to schools. If our government is serious enough about the preservation of our culture then the teaching aids will have to be purchased and given out to schools for the teaching of history immediately.
- (8) The school counseling unit should be up to the task in emphasizing the importance of the subjects that are available for the students before choice of subjects is made.
- (9) Present historical facts to reflect our traditions political development, aspirations and needs. If the teachers are fully aware of our culture and present it correctly to the students by the next millennium it is hoped that majority of Nigerian students will go in for history more than what we are witnessing presently.

Conclusion

To develop a right-thinking citizens who will boost the image of Nigerian and do the nation proud, history which possess our past achievement and failures is the best way to achieve to this. For Nigeria to witness desired transformation in the lives of the citizens and the entire society teaching has to be given more

attention in the next millennium. Undoubtedly, if history is made compulsory students will be able to develop morally as they learn vital lessons from the past events. The legacies of the past and our heritage will be better valued and preserved by the citizens of Nigeria. The issue of intolerance, corruption ethnicity and other social ills will be reduced and with time become forgotten problem.

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