

## **Rethinking Compulsory Teaching of History in Nigeria School System: The Emergent Issues**

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### **Abstract**

Since the advent of western education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the effort of Christian missionaries and its subsequent growth and control by the government, history as a discipline of study feature prominently in the curriculum. This cut across all levels of education, primary to tertiary. However, from 1970s, the situation began to change when emphasis of government policy was on industrial development. The teaching and learning of science and technical courses were given more priority than arts and humanities of which history is one. Since then, the number of students offering history continued to decline and the subject becomes endangered as it is no longer taught in most schools. In Universities, it struggle for survival leading to change of nomenclature to attract students. However, of recent, the federal government has made teaching and learning of history compulsory at basic level of education. It is in the light of this, the paper attempt an examination of issues related to its teaching and learning. Using reconnaissance survey, interview and instant literature in data collections and analysis. The paper observed that major problems to its teaching and learning may include teaching personnel, methodology of teaching, relevant text books and teaching aids that may affect access, equity and quality. The paper therefore concluded that the problems could be overcome through production of relevant text books, provision of teaching aids, training and retraining of teachers and constant supervision.

### **Introduction**

Teaching and learning of history dated back to antiquity when man became conscious of his existence and environment and began to live a sedentary life. The growth in human population led to the building of towns and human societies which precipitated the need for education. Major component of such early education centred on vocational education and provision of information about human beings, their collective experience, norms and values. The essence of which is to keep their society alive as Nwafor Orizu cited in Omolewa observed that “unless we know what we are and how we came about to be what we are, we shall certainly be unable to know where and how to go further”.<sup>1</sup> These early education was provided by parents, grandparents and other members of the society.

Formal teaching and learning of history in Nigeria began with the coming and activities of Christian missionaries who saw education as a fulcrum to their evangelical success. In the provision of western education, history forms part of the curriculum with Bible being a major source of teaching material. This was because Bible contains some inspiring history accounts of human existence and migrations.<sup>2</sup> The growth in educational provision through colonial government controls (Education ordinance) and participation, history was retained and promoted in the school curriculum with emphasis on English and European history. The colonial government participation in the provision of education led to the invitation of British Examination Board to assess secondary school programme. This effort involved the visitation and participation of the University of London from 1887, Cambridge University from 1910 and Oxford University from 1929.<sup>3</sup> The enthusiasm and importance accorded to the teaching and learning of history make it to feature prominently when University College, Ibadan was founded in 1948.<sup>4</sup>

The study of history at school and University level lack no students through to the independence period in 1960 as shown in the West African School Certificate Examination introduced in 1955<sup>5</sup> with about 90 percent of the Nigerian candidates taken history.

The first two decades of Nigerian independence was equally a glorious period in the teaching and learning of history in Nigerian schools. The school leavers gained admission into tertiary institutions while graduates of history lack no job as many of them were employed in both academics and administrative positions.<sup>6</sup> Many became professors in the University and sought for to deliver public lectures or commission to undertake historical studies as exemplified by Prof Ade Ajayi.<sup>7</sup> However, from the late 1970s the study of history began to face challenges leading to low enrolment and in some school not even taught again. The question we need to ask is why the changing situation?

### **The Endangering of History**

The foundation of endangering of history as a course of study began in 1969 when National Curriculum Conference was convened. The conference was convened to review and reform the curriculum in order to meet the needs and aspirations of Nigerians and Nigerian nation. It was meant to accomplish the goals of education in respect to:

- i. The needs of youths and adult individuals in our society.
- ii. The socio-economic needs, values, aspirations and development of our society
- iii. The curriculum substances, the subject content of the system which is the means to the goals.<sup>8</sup>

The major outcome of the curriculum conference was the need for functional education through enhanced curriculum relevance that reflect national cultural heritage and inculcation of needed skills for development with emphasis in science and technology. In an effort to meet up with functional education and skills acquisition through science and technology the curriculum that emerged from the conference led to the reduction in the status of history teaching and learning.<sup>9</sup>

The curriculum conference outcome was lubricated further by the activities of United States of America assisted Ohio Project, the Ayetoro project, the Comparative Education Studies and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) and the Nigeria Education

Research Council that promoted the fostering of social studies and gradual removal of history curriculum at primary and junior secondary schools. This led to the limitation of history to senior secondary schools program and made to be chosen as alternative to Literature in English and Geography.<sup>10</sup>

The culmination of the curriculum conference and subsequent educational submit into the National Policy on Education anchored on 6-3-3-4 system aimed at making education easily accessible to all Nigerians irrespective of status or gender. The emphasis of government on science and technology as a deliberate policy of technology transfer towards industrial development deemphasize school enrolment into arts and humanities in favour of science and technology in ratio of 20 to 80. This affected history teaching and learning which made Bashir in 1987 to lament that the discrimination also affected other physical sciences.<sup>11</sup>

The down ward trend in the fortune of teaching and learning history and employment of its graduates became more affected from 1980s due to general economic meltdown, misplace of value, low morality in the society and lack of creativity, initiative and indolence among the graduates.<sup>12</sup> This made many prospective students to not only keep distance but even parents discourage their wards from the course.

The cumulative effect of the aforementioned, no doubt has tuned history as a course of study into an endangered discipline.

### **Re-compulsory Introduction of History into School Curriculum**

The gradual phasing out of history in Nigeria school curriculum began in 1969 when national curriculum conference was convened. However the official proclamation of deemphasizing teaching of history was in 2009 when federal government deemed it unimportant to Nigerian young citizens citing dearth of teachers and interest by students.<sup>13</sup>

However, long before this proclamation Nigerian professional historians, opinion leaders and concerned citizens have expressed their dismay on the neglect of teaching of history most especially from 1980s. Their persistent call for

reinvigorating of history teaching in Nigerian schools could not be divorced from the importance of history to nation building and nexus between level of morality in the society and absence of historical knowledge and its values.<sup>14</sup> In a reaction to the neglect and scrapping of history, Ukamaka Evelyn Ullisakwe in an interview with Emirekan explained that:

Whoever came up with that plan to scrap history in our schools didn't just wake up to take that decision; they thought it out, new its implication on the future generation. They hated us. They wanted us done with even before we were born.<sup>15</sup>

Her statement was collaborated by the Minister of Education at the launching of history curriculum where he said somebody who doesn't know history is worse than dead.<sup>16</sup> George Orwell on the other hand said, the most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history. Nigeria society and indeed its youths are already caught in the sphere of negativity of the neglect of history.

A decade away from the unfortunate government statement, the situation is reversed by compulsory reintroduction of history as a stand alone subject at basic and junior secondary school levels. This was made known and to take effect from 2018/19 academic session by the Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu at the launching of History Curriculum and Teachers Guide in Abuja. According to him, the essence is not only to allow students to know the history of their country but to serve as a charge agents towards nation building, national identity, patriotism and all human development.<sup>17</sup>

History teaching at basic education level will enhance the adage of catch them young and lay the foundation of building a great nation as enunciated in the national goals of Nigeria education. The goals as captured in the National Policy on Education are:

- i. A free and democratic society
- ii. A united, strong and self reliant nation
- iii. A great and dynamic economy
- iv. A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.<sup>18</sup>

The above national aspirations of Nigeria education seeks to achieve the following for its citizens.

- i. The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen
- ii. The full integration of the individual into the community and
- iii. Provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens.<sup>19</sup>

To achieve these, history teaching and learning could be utilized for effective development of national consciousness, dignity of labour for social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological development. This is because history instill patriotism in the minds of citizens of any nation through laying sound basis for critical and effective thinking among the young ones.

But, to achieve the purpose of teaching history in Nigerian schools, the problems identified as being factors for its relegation and scrapped need to be address along with others. These factors are considered and discussed as emergent issues.

### **The Emergent Issues**

#### **1. Curriculum Conference**

The scrapping of history in school system does not just arise overnight. It began with curriculum conference convened in 1969 on the authority of the government. The conference metamorphosed into National Policy on Education. Thus, the launching of history curriculum and teachers guide is not enough, concerted effort must be put in place in form of national curriculum conference to put in better perspective the teaching and learning of history in Nigeria. This must also be entrenched into the National Policy on Education to give history its proper place of standalone subject due to its rationale. This will be the first stage towards government perception of the relevance of history as a charge agent as stated below: History is the study of the past to help us understand our present situation

so that we can build a better future. At the school level, history should be presented in a way that shows its relevance for the development of the nation ...through the achievement of others in the past, the students can become patriotic, be able to know and take pride in their heritage and be motivated to build on it. Studying history also promotes national harmony and unity as it enables the students to learn about, appreciate and respect the culture of other ethnic groups beside their own.<sup>20</sup>

The inclusion and stand alone subject in the school curriculum for close the twin problem of access and equity as students have choice to make in the subject.

Insufficient qualified teachers

Death of teachers of history was given by government officials in scrapping teaching history at school did not come as a surprise to many. For over thirty years of gradual alienation of history from schools affected enrolment of learners into tertiary education where middle and high level manpower are being trained. In Federal Colleges of Education history was replaced by social studies while in the State Colleges of Education and universities enrolment into history NCE programme and BA(ed) and BA Hons degree saw a dramatic decline. The situation thus endangered the career of history instructors at this level. At the Federal Colleges of Education the history lecturers were converted to social studies department.<sup>21</sup>

The above notwithstanding, a reconnaissance survey across some schools in Minna shows that with measures adopted of attracting enrolment, there exist a reasonable number of teachers in secondary schools.

**Table: 1**

Town	School	Qualification	Base
Minna	Federal Government College	-	2
	Day Secondary School Tunga	4	5
	Day Secondary School Gidan Mungoro	2	2
	Government Day Secondary School Minna	5	2

Survey, 2019.

These numbers could be utilized for effective take off for the reintroduction of history in secondary schools. More so, refresher course and in-service training opportunity and recruitment of others will help solve the problem. The history NCE programe should be reintroduced into federal colleges of education to train teachers and allow for more access.

### Relevant Textbooks

The neglect of history teaching overtime has affected production of relevant textbooks. Prior to the neglect most of the books lay more emphasis on European activities in Africa. The few that focused on the local history and African studies are out of circulation as they have not been reprinted for quite a long time. With the present situation, even if these books could be reached, the contents may be irrelevant, hence the need for production of new books. The new books to be produced must reflect the new functional and more relevant content to the need of the Nigeria citizens and the nation. More so, the books to be produced must be in line with the age and mental maturity of the learners most especially for the children of primary and junior secondary schools. The language usage in the production must be simple and with relevant pictorials to arose and sustain interest of learners.

### Instructional Materials

Effective teaching and learning of any subject of study requires relevant and adequate instructional materials that may be audio, visual or audio-visual. While Adeyinka<sup>22</sup> in his study identified unavailability of instructional materials as a major



challenge to teachers of senior secondary schools where history has been taught for decades. With the introduction to primary and junior secondary schools, the need for provision of relevant materials became a necessity to attain the expected goals.

### **The Syllabus**

Studies in some African nations including Nigeria has shown that concentration of teaching of history at secondary school level have lead to overloading of syllabus. What supposed to be taught across primary and secondary levels; a period of nine years is squeezed or crammed into three years. The overcrowded syllabus according Boadu<sup>23</sup> may lead to either selective teaching to prepare learners for examination or rush through the topics to meet up with syllabus coverage. The effect of both is that students are surcharged in terms of topic to be covered or quality of teaching. The syllabus to be prepared to the primary and junior secondary school should not be overloaded.

### **Time Table**

Allocation of time for subjects in Nigeria primary and secondary schools are not uniform. English and mathematics considered core courses are allocated five periods of teaching per week; meaning once every day from Monday to Friday. However, history and some other subjects are giving two or three period of teaching on the timetable. The period allocated is not enough when compared to the syllabus content. Thus, time table allocation need to be rationalize to accommodate more teaching periods for history.

### **Methodology**

Many teachers of history lack basic pedagogy of teaching most especially considering the impact of ICT on instructional strategies. Many teachers are old school imprisoned with teachers centered method. Thus, the need for retraining to meet up with current trend of learner centered.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Education has become the fulcrum of development of any nation. History as a subject of study has featured prominently in educational curriculum of nations of the world because of its relevance to development of the people as individual or group. Unfortunately in this study, we have been able to established the up and downs in the teaching of history in Nigerian schools. The neglect do the teaching of history in the last three decades has led the nation to its current sorry state of immorality, corruption, disunity, insurgency among others. We also examined the reintroduction of history into primary and secondary schools and established some of the challenges in the implementation. Among these are the entrenchment into curriculum and national policy or education, insufficient qualified teachers, relevant textbooks, instructional materials, the over blown syllabus, time tables and methodology.

The above identified problems among others could be overcome through the political will of the government to provide fund for the convening and review of curriculum and national policy or education, training of teachers, provision of instructional materials among others. Effort should also be put in place to ensure that rural schools lack no teachers in other to ameliorate the issues of access and equity in the teaching of history.

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