
Downward Trend in the Teaching of History in Nigerian School, 1950- 2016

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Abstract

During the pre-colonial era, Africans were familiar with their history especially through oral tradition, myth and legend. At present Nigerians have jettisoned their history. During the colonial era, the British government and other European missionaries set up schools. In these schools, History was considered important and taught amongst other subjects. The change of the education system from 8-6-2-3 system that is 8 years of primary, 6 years secondary, 2 years high school certificate and 3 years university to 6-5-2-3 system in 1954 did not affect the teaching of History as it was still retained in the school curriculum. However, the switch to 6-3-3-4 system in 1982 witnessed the deliberate plan to remove History as a subject in the Junior Secondary classes and replaced with Social Studies. Although History was still taught in the Senior Secondary classes, it was reduced to an optional subject for the students. In 2011 when the government introduced new compulsory subjects, History was not considered important to be made one. The fate of History as an optional subject was therefore sealed. The teaching of History was only re-introduced officially in the Junior Secondary School through an announcement of government made in 2016. This paper argues that the replacement of History with Social Studies in the Junior Secondary classes as a subject is unacceptable and has a lot of drawback effects on national development. Also, it contends that the refusal of the government to make History a compulsory subject till now is inconsistent with the practice of developed

countries like United State of America, and therefore constitutes a serious developmental problem. A cursory look at the importance of the subject is highlighted. This paper examines the teaching of History in the colonial and post-colonial era, together with the policy of the Nigerian Educational Research Development Council (NERDC). It employs the use of primary and secondary sources, combined with qualitative and quantitative approach, and it is arranged in themes. Findings show that the policy of NERDC almost led to the disappearance of History from the Senior Secondary School curriculum by 2011 and this has impeded national development. There are negative effects of the near absence of this subject in the secondary school on the university. Suggestions are made on how to improve the teaching and learning of History in primary and secondary schools.

Keywords: History, Educational Policies, Secondary Schools and Colonialism

Introduction

The Europeans introduced History as a subject to be taught in schools because of its importance. Through the study of History, one is paying heed to one of Socrates' admonitions which is "Man know thyself". For one to know oneself one must have learnt from one's past mistakes. Socrates maintained that an unexamined life is not worth living¹. This view of Socrates must have informed scholars like K. O. Dike and Ajayi Crowder to start writing the History of Africa from the African perspective. K. O. Dike in 1956 in his book, *History of Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta*, looked at Nigeria

from the inside out as observed by A O Animalu². This changed the view of African History because Europeans writing about Africa were biased. In 1982, Social Studies took over the place of History in the Junior Secondary School, but was still maintained in the Senior Secondary School³. Since students were no longer introduced to the subject in the Junior Secondary School, most could not offer it in the Senior Secondary School. As a result of the dwindling population of students offering History, most government schools stopped offering it⁴. This subject was not offered at all in private schools.⁵ As if by collaboration among the various state ministries of education, they stopped posting History teachers to schools.⁶

In 2011 the subject was not considered important to be included among the new compulsory subjects introduced by the government. With this, History was further looked down upon by students. Although the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) argues that the subject was removed from both primary and secondary schools, the present researcher as an eyewitness avers that the subject was in the Senior Secondary School curriculum, but not taught in most schools. However, the fact remains that History was not considered important as a subject in the schools. Prominent individuals like Prof. Wole Soyinka and also Historical Society of Nigeria advocated for its re-introduction⁷. In 2016, Adamu Adamu, the Minister of Education announced the restoration of History in the school system to take effect from September 2017⁸. Stephen Temegha Olali brings to fore the downward trend of History as he points out E.A Ayandele's recognition of the fact in 1968 as he delivered the inaugural address to the Conference of History teachers at the University of Ife. According to him the government of Nigeria and the students were fast losing interest and confidence in History. The

above view was re-iterated in 1979 Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN)) conference at Calabar⁹. Olutayo Charles Adesina asserts the downfall of History in these words:

History which used to be an attractive subject has dropped to the bottom of the ladder of priorities for intending graduates. Historians receive little or no regard in a society that is in a haste to modernise and that places emphasis solely on science and acquisition of material wealth¹⁰.

Prof. A. Adeyinka opines that the government has paid more attention to science related subject than to History¹¹. This is in line with Olutayo's position. He however adds that employers of labour look down on History and History teachers¹². The argument on the government being attracted to science does not hold water because a lot of students offered Christian Religious Studies and Government. J. I. Dibia affirms that History was about going into extinction. This resulted into fear and skepticism among historians, he states¹³. CBN Ogbobo, a historian cum legal luminary in 2015 in an address to HSN noted that Nigerian historians and enlightened individuals were uncomfortable with the state of historical scholarship in Nigeria¹⁴. Scholars such as J F Ade Ajayi, E J Alagoa, Obaro Ikime, A E Afigbo, Okon Uya and others noticed how the subject was nose diving. The removal of History in most government owned secondary schools might not be deliberate as other subjects like Geography, Economics and the Nigerian Languages were also affected in 2011, following the introduction of two additional compulsory subjects.

This paper posits that History should be made compulsory from primary through Junior Secondary School to Senior Secondary School. It is divided into six sections, viz: importance of History, teaching of History in the colonial era, education system in Nigeria from 1950 to 2016, reasons for downward trend in the learning and teaching of History, recommendations and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

The concepts to be considered in this paper are history and educational policies E.H Carr defines History as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”¹⁵. According to Arthur Marwick, the definition of History is in 3 parts. Firstly, it connotes the entire human past as it actually happened; secondly it connotes “man’s attempt to describe and interpret the past’ and thirdly that History is a systematic study of the past”. According to Prof G. Barrowclough, History is the attempt to discover on the basis of fragmentary evidence, the significant things about the past¹⁶. According to Osokoya, the subject History has many definitions making him to note thus, "there seems to be no end to definition of History”¹⁷. Despite the various definitions of History, the following are the common denominators found in the definitions.

- History is derived from the Greek word "historia"
- History treats activities of humans that are of utmost societal importance
- History investigates past events.

R.V. Daniels sees History as the memory of our group experience which if forgotten or abandoned makes people to stop being

humans. According to him without History people have no identity. He goes on thus:

It is the events recorded in History that have generated all the emotions, the values, the ideas that make life meaningful that have given men something to live for, struggle over and die for. Historical events have created all the basic human groupings – countries, religions, classes and all the loyalties that attach to these¹⁸

S.C Ilo submits thus:

History is a meaning-filled engagement with events and facts both in the past as well as in the present. History is a hermeneutics of culture that is, every engagement with history yields some fruitful results for the people based on how truthful, objective and authentic is the interpretation of the events¹⁹.

To dissect the concept of educational policy it will be necessary to take a look at the meaning of education and policy. Education means the process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools and colleges.²⁰ A.B Fafunwa defines education broadly as what comprises every effort, conscious and direct, incidental and indirect, carried out by a given society to accomplish some objectives that are considered desirable in terms of the individual's own needs and the needs of the people where the programme is carried out.²¹In Fafunwa's opinion, education is beyond mere schooling.

The Director General of UNESCO in March 1963 defined education in these words:

Education is not only instilling knowledge but awakening the enormous creative potential that lies within each of us, enabling all of us to develop to our fullest potential and better contribute to the societies in which we live.²²

Policy is a plan of action agreed or chosen by a political party, business etc²³. Educational policy therefore refers to the plan by government toward teaching, training and learning in schools, colleges and universities.

Importance of History

History became a field of study in many schools during 1800²⁴. Today, pupils and students in primary and secondary schools in the globe study History. Unfortunately, Nigeria is almost an exception. The importance of History as a subject to pupils and students cannot be over emphasized. It provides training in the development of critical faculty as it comprises the thought in analyzing cause and effect and in comparing the pros and cons of historical proofs or evidence. The learner acts like a detective investigating a case. All evidences are weighed in order to get to the root of a matter. Before any fair judgment could be passed by any judge, evidences are properly examined. History also widens the students' imagination by making him regard past events as if they are happening during his time or in his presence.²⁵The learners will not want to repeat mistakes made by people in the past. With what the Igbo ethnic group went through in the 1967 – 1970 Nigeria-Biafra war, no rightful thinking Igbo will want to go through such again. It also broadens the students' philosophy of life by teaching how the

various people lived in the past and how they strived to surmount peculiar problems of their period and environment.

History promotes national development as there cannot be development without History. For a country to develop it must delve into the past to ascertain the nature of development plans, policies and projects and their effects on the nation. Dr Muritala Olalekon of the Department of History, University of Ibadan airs his view thus: “You cannot do without referring to past events at every stage of a given country’s development” He goes further to say History focuses on the political, economic and social aspects of a country’s development ²⁶. Prof God’swill Obioma points out that History has the capacity to enlighten the citizens on the nature of their evolution and intercommunal relationship in the past.²⁷ Such enlightenment could enhance national development/nation building as tolerance, patriotism, solidarity and empathy become the watchword among citizens. Religious bigotry, nepotism and other vices will then be reduced to its barest minimum. Babangida Kachalla, a research expert in the Centre of Trans Saharan Studies at the University of Maiduguri postulates that in order to have a sophisticated society “we must promote our cultures, values and History in school, for the forthcoming generation to inherit”²⁸. This sophisticated society will equally eschew bitterness and rancour thereby promoting national development.

History will make a citizen to know who he/she is, where he is coming from and where he is going to. R.V. Daniels supports the above view in these words “without history, we have no knowledge of who we are or how we came to be, like victims of collective amnesia grouping”²⁹. K. O. Dike posits that nations work on their future from the past³⁰. Uzoigwe writes that historians must examine

the past in connection of present day problem³¹. Obaro Ikime quoted E.H. Carr thus “Great history is written precisely when historians' vision of the past is illuminated by insight into the problems of the present”.³² In a nutshell, History studies the past so as to understand the present and be able to plan for the future. The past gives birth to the present and the present begets the future.



The Teaching of History during the Colonial Era.

It is reported that History was taught as a subject in 1859 following the books ordered by Herbert Macaulay. According to Fajana, Herbert ordered the following books: Grammar, Composition, Arithmetic , History , Geography, Eaton’s Latin Grammar and Valosy’s French Grammar and Philosophy. Also, the Methodist High School in Lagos formed in 1878 did the following subjects: English, Orthography, Writing, Dictation, Arithmetic, Algebra, Grammar, History, Physiology, Geology, Botany etc.³³

History was given enough time on the school time table by the British. It was an examination subject selected by British Examination Board invited to evaluate secondary school performance in the colony. Students were asked to explain policies, discuss events, describe major reforms, compare personalities and identify major problems confronting leaders and countries in examination questions. Anthony Enahoro’s love for politics was facilitated by his History teacher at Kings College, Lagos. He said that he taught History as if he was preparing them for political career rather than for examination.³⁴

There were the Phelp Stokes Commission reports and the 1925 Memorandum on Education Policy in British tropical Africa. This report acknowledged the teaching of History in schools:

*on the quality of education in Nigeria at that time (1925). The commission observed that the curriculum was a mere carbon copy of European American models. According to it, little attempt was made to use local materials in the teaching of such subjects as History and Geography*³⁵

In 1930, ERJ Hursey produced a memorandum on education policy in Nigeria. He was the Director for the Education Department for the whole of Nigeria. This policy led to the creation of the Yaba Higher College in 1932. This was the first higher education institution in Nigeria. It contributed to teacher education in Nigeria. Courses in medicine, sciences, engineering and other vocations were offered. Courses for secondary school teacher education began in 1934 and candidates were mostly prospective science teachers. The sciences included Biology, Zoology, Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics. In year one there was the combination of either Biology or Chemistry with Physics as minor. The Arts had combinations of English and either classics (Latin and Greek) or History with Mathematics or Geography as minor. There were General Studies courses in English language, English Literature, the History of Nigeria and Geography of Nigeria for those in the sciences. A sub degree diploma certificate was the terminal qualification from the college.³⁶

Jean Allen of the Northern Regional Library listed titles of books under History and there were thirty-nine of them. They included

Twentieth Century Britain: 1900-1950 by Allen A.B, *Britain and the British people* by Barker SE, *Britain and the Dominions* by Brook W.R, *British Overseas* by Carrington C.E and others.³⁷ It is true that the books all centered on Europe as the History being taught was eurocentric implying that what was taught was about Europeans and their activities in Africa. The popular belief during the early colonial era was that Africa had no history.

The Education System in Nigeria from 1950s to 2016

In 1954 the colonialists transformed the education system from 8-6-2-3 (that is 8 years of primary, 6 years secondary, 2 years high school certificate and 3 years university) to 6-5-2-3 system. There was the introduction of the universal free primary education by Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of former Western Region in 1955. This led to the adoption of a 6-6 system that is 6 years primary and 6 years secondary education system .By 1961, the Eastern Region was operating 7-6 system and in 1964 it changed to 6--6 system. The grammar schools including the technical and commercial school changed to a 5year system in the 1960s. Consequently, there was the 6-5 system of primary and secondary education in the 1970s in all parts of Nigeria except the North. The Northern region still maintained the 8-5 system³⁸.Michael Omolewa writes that by 1966, History featured prominently in the Higher School Certificate Examination³⁹. He points out that English had 244 principal passes. Others were as follows:

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SUBJECT	PRINCIPAL PASS	FAILURE
Latin	3	Not stated
Geography	269	Not stated
Mathematics	88	57
French	19	Not stated
History	414	22
Chemistry	601	307

Source: M. Omolewa, “Assault on Teaching of History in Nigerian Schools” *The Guardian*, 10th February 2015 (Accessed on 23rd March, 2020)

Remark: The author of this paper is responsible for the tabulation. The original author did not tabulate the information above.

The 6-3-3-4 system can be traced to the national curriculum conference of 1969 that took effect in 1982. This conference was held in Lagos and sponsored by the National Education Research Council (NERC). The conference agreed for 6years primary, 3years junior secondary, 3years senior secondary and four years university⁴⁰. The plan to relegate History as a subject to the background started in 1982 with the emergence of Social Studies as its replacement. The replacement was as a result of World Bank’s directive in 1980 for the restructuring of the school curriculum following the non-viability of History as a course of study.⁴¹The

vision statement of the Nigerian Educational Research Development Council (NERDC) reads thus: “Building and systemizing a culture of strategic Educational Research and Development that will inform the formulation and effective implementation of policies in education as well as other related sector of the economy”.⁴² Going by the aforementioned, NERDC prepares curriculum for primary and secondary schools and can even change the years spent during primary, secondary and tertiary education. By 1969 it sponsored the conference that finally led to the adoption of 6-3-3-4 system. Then, it was known as the National Educational Research Council (NERC).

The first 3 years for Junior Secondary School in the 6-3-3-4 system had the following subjects:

- Core subjects: Mathematics, English, and 2 Nigerian Languages, Science, Social Studies, Art and Music, Practical Agriculture, Religious and Moral instruction, Physical and Health Education and two Prevocational subjects.
- Pre-vocational subject: Woodwork, Metal Work, Electronics, Mechanics, Local Crafts, Home Economics and Business Studies.
- Non-Vocational electives: Arabic Studies and. French

The last 3 years in the secondary school had the following senior secondary subjects:

- Core subjects: English, one Nigerian Language, Mathematics, one of Physics, Chemistry or Biology, one of Literature in English, History or Geography, Agricultural Science or a vocational subject.

- Electives: Three of the electives must be selected from Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Additional Mathematics, Commerce, Economics, Book keeping, Type Writing, Short Hand, History, English Literature, Geography, Agricultural Science, Home Economics, Bible knowledge, Islamic Studies, Arabic Studies, Metal work, Electronics, Technical Drawing, Wood work, Auto Mechanics, Music, French, Physical Education, Health Science and Government⁴³.

Uzoigwe kicks against this elective nature of History in Secondary Schools as he points out that future historians cannot be produced by this policy. According to him, a nation immersed in problem should not sideline History as a subject, but utilize it to proffer solutions to the problems.⁴⁴

It is said that in 2007, the government of Obasanjo officially banned the teaching of History in Nigerian primary and secondary schools⁴⁵. This is not completely true. The reasons given for the removal were dearth of history teachers, lack of jobs for history graduates, few students offering the subject amongst others. The fact is that History was removed from curriculum of primary school and Junior Secondary School in 1982 but retained in the Senior Secondary School curriculum, with very few schools teaching it as time went on. In 2007, NERDC introduced Civic Education in the Junior Secondary School with content of the scheme similar to that of Social Studies. Teachers questioned the rationale of introducing Civic Education because topics like human rights, rule of law, arms of government, traffic rules and regulations, right attitude to work, negative behaviour, national security and population census were contained in both Civic Education and Social Studies. The merger

of these subjects in 2014 took care of these topic duplications. Before 2011, there were some elements of History in the scheme of Social Studies like the amalgamation of 1914. In 2011, the historical aspect of Social Studies was removed as witnessed by the author of this paper who was a classroom teacher.

In 2011, NERDC made a policy change in Nigeria Education system where it made Civic Education compulsory for all students in addition to English and Mathematics that were already compulsory. Civic Education was introduced for the first time in the Senior Secondary School. Thirty-four (34) Entrepreneurial Trade subjects were also introduced. They included: Animal Husbandry; Auto Body Repair and Spray Painting; Auto Electrical Works; Auto Mechanical Works; Auto Parts Merchandising; Block layering; Brick layering and Concreting; Book keeping; Carpentry and Joinery; Catering; Craft Practice; Cosmetology; Data processing; Dyeing and Bleaching; Electrical Installation and Maintenance Work; Fisheries; Furniture Making; Garment Making; GSM Phone Maintenance and Repairs; Leather Goods Manufacturing and Repairs; Painting and Decorating; Photography; Plumbing and Pipe-fitting; Printing Craft and Practice; Radio, Television and Electronic Works, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning; Salesmanship; Store keeping ; Tourism; Upholstery; Welding, and Fabrication Engineering and Craft Practice.⁴⁶

The students were to choose only one of these trade/entrepreneurial subjects. This new policy had a negative effect on students' choice of subjects for Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). The first set of students who sat for this examination in 2014 had to choose English, Mathematics, Civic Education and one entrepreneurial subject. Additional five subjects had to be added to

the four to make the total number of subjects nine. Students' preference for History dropped significantly. The fate of History as a subject thus grew worse.

In 2014, subjects offered in Junior Secondary School were reduced by combining two or more subjects to become one subject known as theme. Social Studies, Civic Education, Christian Religious knowledge and Security Education were all treated under one theme known as Religion and National values (RNV). Basic Science, Basic Technology, Physical and Health Education and Computer Science were treated under Basic Science and Technology. Home Economics and Agricultural Science were being treated as Pre-vocational Studies (PVS). Cultural and Creative Arts comprised Fine Arts, and Music. There were subjects that were not merged and were treated separately. They included French, Business Studies, Mathematics and English Language known as English and Literary Studies. History was never considered to be included in the new school curriculum.

Reasons for the Downward Trend in the Teaching and Learning of History

A school of thought challenges the view of restoring History in its proper place in the school system averring that it is mere storytelling and fraught with fallacies. Why study something that happened in the 16th century that will add no value to life, some will ask? Tunji Olepa, a political scientist and public administrator acknowledges the importance of History as he says "I agree with Fredrick Von Schlegel, the German philosopher, that historians are prophets in reverse". He regards them as custodians of the past, hence the government is afraid them. To him this is one of the reasons History

was expunged from the school curriculum⁴⁷. Chidubem Obaji believes that historical study declined because it could not solve the political, economic and social problems from the 1970s in Nigeria⁴⁸. Has the problem been solved with the decline of historical study? The answer is no as Nigeria is still today enmeshed in poor leadership and management. At the 2005 HSN Congress, Ade Ajayi apportioned blame on History teachers for the decline of History by not grappling their initial success with both hands. He observed that the academic history community stayed aloof and watched Social Studies being domiciled in Social Science in Colleges of Education and Universities.⁴⁹The major reason students didn't offer History in the Senior Secondary School was because of the subject Government that was introduced in the 1970s. Students were to choose between History and Government. Most of them chose Government because most schools didn't offer History. Where these two options were available, they chose Government since they felt that History was abstract. Moreover, some students claimed that History was voluminous unlike Government. They would not want to read a subject they felt they would not be able to finish before their final exams⁵⁰Furthermore, students complained of the too many dates and names one had to memorise. They believed the only way out was to cram these names and dates. Those with poor memory would run away from the subject.⁵¹Moreso, some people argued that the dearth of History teachers made schools not to offer this subject. This was a blatant lie because every year Nigerian universities churned out History graduates who looked for jobs. Finally, the government policy on education led to the eclipse of the subject. It was alleged that the Nigerian Government did not want the students to enquire about the Nigeria Biafra War (1967 to 1970). This allegation is misleading because the war was and is still a topic in the scheme of Government as a subject in the school curriculum,

though not comprehensive. Also, it was also alleged that the government did not want children to know that the present Bight of Bonny was earlier known as Bight of Biafra.⁵²

The effects of the near absence of History in secondary school on university education are as follows:

- Most students who gain admission into the university through University Tertiary Matriculation Examination to study History and International Studies do not have elementary knowledge of History. This is because they offered Government as an option while in secondary school. They find it difficult to comprehend some of the History courses in higher institutions. University teachers complain that the students make things difficult for them because they don't have a fore knowledge of the subject matter.
- Another negative effect is on JUPEB (Joint University Preliminary Education Board) programme which replaced the university diploma programme in 2016 in most universities. The JUPEB students are expected to run the programme for about one year, before taking the exam and they must obtain Direct Entry form. Successful Students in the JUPEB Examination are admitted into 200 level in the course of their choice. It has been observed that students who apply to read History and International Studies under JUPEB do not take History as a subject. They rather prefer to choose Government. One wonders how such student could cope, since success in the programme accords him direct admission into year II under History and International Studies.

Recommendations

The recommendations to the teaching and learning of History are as follows

- In teaching History, watching of films should be introduced. Apart from hearing the stories, the pupils and students can easily see for themselves how events took place. There are films on some historical events
- A law should be made by the government to make the subject compulsory in primary, junior and secondary school. Those who contravene the law should be heavily fined. Before pupils are admitted into secondary school, they will have fore knowledge of the subject.
- The government should employ History graduates to teach the subject. They will give their best unlike non-history graduates who read and teach. The subject matter is beyond the grasp of the non-history graduates.
- Teaching aids like maps and pictures should be used to attract the attention of students. Excursion to historical sites and museums should also be encouraged. Events should be explained as if they are happening in the present.
- The education ministry should ensure that before a primary or secondary school is given approval, there should be available evidence that the school offers History.
- Aspects of local History of the state where a school is situated should be taught. Pupils and students have the advantage and attraction of direct experience and their initiative and attitude of enquiry and discovery can be developed.⁵³

Conclusion

This paper looks at how educational policies affected the teaching and learning of History in Nigerian schools. The belief that History was officially removed in 2007 is not completely true as this researcher believes that it was done in 1982 in the Junior Secondary School curriculum, but maintained in the Senior Secondary School curriculum. As a result of the introduction of Government in the 1970s, with time students preferred Government over History as an option in SSCE (Senior School Certificate Examination). This affected the number of students offering History and the subject almost went into extinction. The World Bank had in 1980 hammered on the restructuring of the school curriculum with the excuse that history was not viable as a course of study coupled with the recommendations of American trained educators. Many schools especially private schools were not offering History as at 2016. It should be noted that very few government schools were offering History as at 2016 as noticed by the researcher through the few SSCE scripts being marked at the WAEC (West African Examination Council) marking venue at Government Technical College, Owerri. This near absence of History has impeded national unity and integration, thereby affecting nation building as religious bigotry, intolerance and secession agitations have been on the increase making the nation not to derive the benefits/importance of History. History was reintroduced in September, 2017 and made compulsory for Junior Secondary School but most schools are yet to start offering the subject. From 2020, J.S.S 3 students in some states in Nigeria will sit for it in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). This paper calls for more pressure from HSN to make History compulsory in the Senior Secondary School

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