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The Discipline of History; a Quest for Survival in Nigerian Academic Instructions: A Case Study of Academic Institutions in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract:

History as an academic discipline is facing extinction particularly in Nigeria. This cannot be attributed to a single factor as several unarguable socio-political and anti-academic challenges are faced by the discipline constantly and continuously. Some of these challenges include British colonial educational legacy, government policy on education, parental attitude towards students' choices of subjects and careers, lack of history teachers, history textbooks and teaching aids, poor admission policy into the Department of History, the latest setback is the fraternization of history with other courses like Diplomacy, Security Studies, International Relations, International Studies and other disciplines. These mergers, though attractive are weakening the core history thus forcing it to struggle for survival. The paper asserts that government policy on education should place history as a core subject for primary and secondary schools and not an elective as it is at present. Also, that history should be taken as a compulsory subject for admission into the Department of History in all tertiary institutions even when history is combined with other courses. In addition, students and parents should be adequately informed on the importance of history to national development.

1. Introduction

History as an academic discipline, is the study of the past. It is the gathering and analysis of historical raw materials for the purpose of reconstructing and making sense, about past events. That means that the past will remain dead and buried until the historian digs it out, analyses it and try to allot meaning to it. History is a very high academic discipline because the rigorous intellectual application it develops in, and demands from its practitioners dismisses the notion that it is an archaic subject or that it constitutes a low level academic activity. History trains the intellect in very useful and profound ways. These include, but not limited to, reading and research, thesis formulation, data analysis and the writing up of findings (Mathews, 2011).

Studying history, according to Gelien Mathews, makes avid, meticulous and critical readers out of its students. This is because the historian is expected to read widely, not only to grasp the content of historical writing but also to ascertain the lines of argument, the kinds and ranges of sources as well as the styles within the historical discourse. Historical sources which is a vital dimension of historical enquiry, involves the application of complicated and sophisticated methodologies. For instance, in recent years, paleography, literary and word frequency comparisons have been adopted to establish authorship. Also carbon 14 and thermo luminescence dating tests have also shed light on the date of historical sources (Watson, 2004).

Though no single paper can exhaust the importance of history, but suffice it to say that history is an important trajectory connecting the past to the present and the future. Thus the clichés that the past repeats itself, and that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, must always be placed in proper context (Marwick, 1970). In the same vein, according to Robert Nester Marley in the song "Buffalo Soldier" "if you know your history, then you will know where you are coming from".

Several writers have presented poignant defenses for studying history by underscoring its role in linking past, present and future. Noted historian, Edward Hallett Carr, asserts that "History is an unending dialogue between past and present" (Carr, 1961). Finberg (1962) posits that "...the present is only an individual dividing line between the future and the past". The Novelist William Faulkner wisely observed that, "the past is never dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner, 1951). George Orwell in his novel, Nineteen Eighty Four, warned, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949).

According to Marwick (1970) "without history we shall not begin to understand the problems of the present and will be without the basic knowledge essential for grappling intelligently with the future". The above captures the importance and relevance of history as an academic discipline with regards to its interconnectivity with time and other academic disciplines, since there is no academic discipline without the past and it is only history and the historian that can discover that past.

In spite of the above painted picture, history as an academic discipline appears to be facing extinction. This can be seen by the number of students on enrollment in both private and public secondary schools as well as the number of teachers employed to teach history in government and private schools. This problem is attributed to several strong and unarguable factors, ranging from government policy on education, misconceptions and misrepresentations about history as an academic discipline, parental influence on wards choices of

subjects, inadequate number of history teachers, lack of teaching aids and history books, lack of scholarship for students of history and research fundings. In addition, the merging of history with other academic disciplines like Diplomacy, International Studies, Security Studies, International Relations, Strategic Studies etcetera is another factor trying to extinguish history from existence.

2. British Colonial Educational Legacy

It is an acceptable fact that a combination of external and internal forces has undermined Nigerian society by etching a deplorable epitaph to the correct meaning of education. According to Kalu (1987),

- Whereas education in Europe and other societies grew out of their organic needs, it was planted and developed in Nigeria by forces outside the nation. Education in Nigeria was patchy, a by-product of the legitimate trade and the evangelizing goals of European missionaries... Thus, traders and the colonial authorities implanted Western education in Nigeria in order to facilitate communication, promote trade and systematize the administrative organs of colonialism (pp. 99-100).

Thus. This Eurocentric educational foundation had nothing to do with the study of history of Nigeria, since according to people like Huge Trevor Roper, Africa has no history. There is no doubt that this trend has continued. That is why Niyi Osundare in his acknowledgement of the outstanding nationalistic role of the University of Ibadan School of History pointed out that:

- The Ibadan School of History re-invented African history and African Historiography and shamed the racist notion that Humanity's oldest continent was a place without a past. U. I. became the Mecca for scholars of African History all over the world (p. 54).

Nevertheless, even the Ibadan School of History is said to be a shadow of its old self-having turned from being the trailblazer it has become the blaze-trailer. This is because as a sub-set of the Nigerian mathematical equation the school is decaying along with the Nigerian educational and political system. This is a picture of the struggle for survival of history as an academic discipline.

3. Government Policy on Education

Government policy on education stipulates that there shall be a basic education for a 9-year duration, comprising 6 years of primary and 3 years of junior secondary education. This policy states that 9 years of basic education is free and compulsory and the aims are to:

- inculcate national consciousness and unity;
- inculcate the type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society;
- training the mind in the understanding of the world around and
- acquire appropriate skills in the development of mental physical and social abilities and completeness.

If the aim of the national policy stated above is to inculcate national consciousness, values and to train the mind, then history could have been the required compulsory subject to achieve this aim. This is because according to Jenkins (1991).

- A continuum of the past's influence on the present and the future is the crucial role that the discipline of history plays in crafting for a people their sense of seeing. History is our memory bank. If we have no history, we have no memory and, consequently, no identity (pp.18-19).

Jenkins further asserts that it is the absence of historical understanding that people experience virtual amnesia and psychologically traumatic situations.

Through the study of history, however, a sense of belonging, national pride, patriotism, understanding and appreciation of present circumstances, especially relations with others, can take root and flourish, and can be used by leaders to motive people to move in one direction or the other. These are the reasons, as Marwick points out, why nations take special care and pride in maintaining museums, achieves and libraries, devoted to the preservation of sources and relics of the past (Marwick, 1970). History is the only proof that a group of people did exist in the past. This function alone furnishes the discipline with the esteem it deserves. History is a prerequisite for giving and shaping the identity of all peoples of the world.

Without any equivocation, through the study of history, Nigerians might be able to trace the ugly and the good side of the Nigerian state. But an average Nigerian does not show that sense of patriotism and nationalism to the country. The sense of pride through national identity and sense of respect to national symbols are not just there. The missing link is that government's policy on education sidelines history which should have been placed as a core compulsory subject, if not from the primary level at least from the level of the junior secondary school. But history is placed both at the junior and senior secondary school levels as elective subject.

The Nigerian government can learn from the western countries who use their history, whether of victory or defeat to aid their national developments. For instance, Britain have used her historiography which is nationalistic in nature to impact her citizens in three ways. Firstly, in the context of some history, in which the political institutions of British and the achievements of some individuals are described in superlative and idyllic language. Considering for instance the portrayals of parliament, the reformation and the "glorious revelation" of 1688 (Ayandele, 1979).

Secondly, in the context of European history in which the naval and military achievements of Britain are covered in heroic terms. Thirdly, in the context of British expansion overseas, in which colonial exploitation of India and African countries is presented in laudable and humanitarian terms. British citizens are taught all these in their history classes and this has generated in them the sense of patriotism and nationalism. The same applies to American historiography, French, Russian, Japanese and German historiography.

American historiography for instance, lauds to the skies the virtues of American institutions in impregnating Americans with notion that has assumed the states of an article of faith, that to be American is the greatest blessing God can confer on a human being (Ayandele, 1979). This history is passed from generation to generation and every child gets it from their history class at an early stage in life.

If Nigeria's historiography was treated as indicated above and then included in the national policy on education as a compulsory subject to students of a particular age bracket, it would have made history to be valued as a discipline and not as a discipline offered out of frustration as it is in Nigeria today. Because of this disregard for history as a discipline which reflects on the national policy on education, even state governments also implement policies that are detrimental to the survival of history as academic discipline.

Information obtained through this research indicates that about 36 teachers were recruited for history as against 3,600 teachers that were taken for other subjects, during the year 2000 teachers recruitment exercise by the Federal Ministry of Education. Out of these, two teachers were posted to Akwa Ibom and Cross River States (Mbikan, 2016). This lack of history teachers accounts for why many Unity Colleges reluctantly offer history.

This trends is not different from what is obtained in the various states in Nigeria. For instance, during the 2002 teacher's employment in Akwa Ibom State, whereas hundreds were employed for sciences and technical subjects, only nine (9) teachers of history were employed for all the secondary schools in all the thirty-one local government areas that make up the state. In 2007, out of more than 900 teachers employed in Akwa Ibom State, only two (2) were history teachers, one from Ikono and the other from Eastern Obolo. Of these two only one of them had B. Ed. History (Mbikan, 2016).

Also, unconfirmed report indicate that out of about 1,500 teachers that were recruited in 2012 only one person was taken as history teacher. It is not surprising then to discover that the only College of Education owned by the Akwa Ibom State Government – COE Afaha Nsit has existed without History Department for more than 20 years of existence of the College (David, 2017). For instance, out of the five Federal Government Colleges located in Akwa Ibom State, only three are studying History. In the two, the subject is offered by students in the Senior Secondary levels (SS 1 – SS3) and not compulsory and only a few students offer if the problem ranges from lack of teachers, lack of interest by student and government policy, as shown below:

| S/N | Name of School | Classes Offering History | No of History Teachers | Number of Student Offering History |
|-----|---|------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| 1 | Federal Government College, Ikot Ekpene | Senior Secondary One - Three | One | SS 1-63 student out of 280, SS 2- 58 out of 350, SS 3- 19 out of 357 |
| 2 | Federal Government Girls College, Ikot Obio Itong | None | None | None |
| 3 | Federal Girls Technical College, Uyo | None | None | None |
| 4 | Police Secondary School, Ukana | Senior Secondary One – Three | One | Between 7-10 student in a class of 145 – 150 students |
| 5 | Air Force Secondary School, Uyo | Senior Secondary One- Three | One | Between 3-5 student in a class of 120-150 |

Table 1: Federal Government Colleges in Akwa Ibom State where History is Taught

Source: Teachers and Students of the above schools

It is noteworthy to mention that the teacher who was teaching History for more than 10 years at Federal Government Girls College, Ikot Obio Itong was transferred to Federal Girls Technical College, Uyo where he is currently teaching Civic Education and social Studies (Sunday, 2017).

Also, out of twenty Private Secondary School sampled in Akwa Ibom State, only six are offering History, and that is done in the Senior Secondary Section. Of about twenty Government and Private primary Schools sampled, none is offering History. Of about twenty Government Secondary School sampled only six are offering History and this is in the Senior Secondary section with very low percentage of the students.

If children are not made to know and accept and cherish their national identity and story of origin, if children are not made to know the value of relationship with other people whose historical background is with little variation from their own; if children are not shown the value of history and the importance of the subject to national development at that early stage, then it becomes very difficult for them when they grow up to become leaders to make or implement any policy that can favour such subject, and the cycle continues. Thus government policy is waging serious war against the survival of history as a discipline. Perhaps why many Nigerian leaders show apathy towards history is the fact that many of them do not want the next generation of Nigerians to read about their ugly past which is enmeshed in corrupt practices.

4. Misconceptions and Misrepresentations about History

A number of times, a number of people have misrepresented the study of history through unfounded and careless comments, unsubstantiated speeches and uncalculated writings. Some of such statements and comments have had profound impacts in bringing into disrepute the study of history in comparison with other disciplines especially when such irrational utterances emanated from people who are placed on high esteem by the society.

Some people view history as dead, dusty and buried. This is a misrepresentation of Elton, (1967), Elton states, “the future is dark, the present burdensome. Only the past, dead and buried, bears contemplation”. Others have dismissed history as all relativists. In one of Jane Austen’s novels, a character called Catherine Morland said of the discipline. “I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention” (Austen, 1969). Henry Ford uttered one of the most demeaning remarks about the discipline when he said, “I don’t know much about history, and I wouldn’t give a nickel for all the history of the world. History is more or less bunk. It is tradition. We want to live with present, and the only history that is worth a tinker’s damn is the history we make today” (Chicago Tribune, 1916).

In 2011, during one of his numerous motivational conferences Myles Munroe said, “I was not born to protect history but to make history” (Munroe, 2010). As earlier mentioned, some of these statements have impacted negatively on the discipline of history and have made a lot of people to look down on it. These misconceptions are part of the battles history is fighting constantly and continuously in order to survive.

5. The Parents, Teachers and History

A child’s immediate academic constituency is the home. The first teachers and counselors are the parents and the guardians and they play very significant and compelling roles in the educational choices of their wards.

Over the years and in many parts of the world especially in Nigeria, parents make choices of subjects they want their children to study whether with the consent of their children or against their will. Since parents have serious roles to play on their children’s education, they should, for the interest of the country encourage them to study history in order to ginger patriotism and nationalism in them. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, for instance, identified eight national goals for public schools. Goal 8 states:

- Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

Also, “Title V: promoting informed parental choice and innovative programs” of the No child left behind Act of 2001 contains numerous provisions for school, family and community involvement in students’ learning. Education policy makers in Nigeria should emulate this, so that parents can make informed and patriotic choices when selecting subject for their children.

The trend in Nigeria is that parents always go for vocational subjects or the so called professional courses, ranging from Law, Engineering, Medical Sciences, Business Management, Journalism, etcetera. It is on very rare cases that parents will choose History as a course for their wards or influence them to do so, except when they are frustrated from their initial first-choice course and they have no alternative but to fall back on history. And in many instances, especially before the expansion of the department of history, many of such students who were “frustrated” into doing history will always apply for a change to their preferred courses after their first year in the university, thus, abandoning history. Others will prefer to write JAMB examination again in order to study the actual course they initially intended to study. This makes history to be a launching ground which is always abandoned afterwards. This is working against the discipline.

Teachers have also contributed to the stifling of history in the way they handle the discipline, especially while teaching. According to Fred Lunenburg and Allan Ornstein (2008), “one foundational premise of constructivism is that children actively construct their knowledge, rather than simply absorbing ideas spoken to them by teachers. In this wise, teachers are expected to teach the students in a manner that they can internalize the subject, generate new thoughts, understandings and beliefs.

They further assert that in this line of teaching, history texts will always become in the minds of the student a stimulus to historical thinking, while Geography texts are internalized to produce geographical thinking. Same should be the case with mathematics and other subjects (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2008).

Because students lack the experience of experts in the field, teachers bear a great responsibility for guiding students activity, modeling behavior, and providing examples that will transform students group discussion into meaningful communication about subject matter. When this approach is adopted, students will automatically become inquisitive and this will motivate them into further research that will make the subject lively and lovable.

However, the way history is taught in many academic institutions is such that the subject does not motivate students critical thinking, rather it is boring and scaring. An SS2 student of Apostolic Faith Secondary School, Mkpatak Essien Udim Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom States says, “about half of the students in our class use to sleep during history class when I was in SS1, because it was always boring. Thus in SS2 almost all the students abandoned the subject since it was not compulsory for us to offer it at that level” Akpan Etukudo (2017). If teaching aids like maps, pictures, motion pictures and other items that could create lasting impressions on the minds of these students are used as teaching aids, especially at the secondary school level, then it is obvious that students would have had more interest studying history. Apart from these, if students take trips to museums and other historical sites as part of their studies, it would motivate them.

Another problem with didactic teaching that is used by history teachers is that content is inadvertently treated as static and virtually dead. Content is treated as something to be mimicked, to be parroted. And because students only rarely process content deeply when they play the role of passive listeners in lecture-centered instruction, little is learned in the long term. Furthermore, because students are taught content in a way that renders them unlikely to think it through, they retreat into note memorization, abandoning any attempt to grasp the logic of what they are committing to memory Lunenburg (2008). The cycle continues making the subject unattractive to students who would have taken it.

6. History and Other Disciplines: Marriage of Convenience or Expansion?

For about a decade now, the Department of History, perhaps in a bid to keep the discipline afloat among the committee of academic disciplines, began the expansion of the department of History to reflect an enhanced status. Thus, a place like the University of Uyo is expanded to become Department of History and International studies, University of Calabar is going with the same nomenclature, University of Port Harcourt with Diplomatic Studies; University of Abuja has undergone the process and has metamorphosed into the Department of History and Strategic Studies (Ina, 2017).

The beauty of this merger or expansion is that it has attracted so many students into the Departments of History and has boosted the morale of the Department. But the negative side to the situation is that students so admitted into the Department reluctantly identify with History. They prefer to be seen and addressed as diplomats to being called historians. Moreover, even from the point of admission, many Universities accept Government in the place of History as part of their entry requirements. Thus students so admitted, lack the pre-requisite knowledge needed to study History and this further encourages students to run away from history in their secondary schools, since they know that with or without History they will still gain admission into the Department. The negative impact of this on History can better be imagined.

Also, students admitted under this condition and new arrangements, are most times struggling with core History courses, while they prefer and willing to study the borrowed courses. If this trend is not handled with care, a time will come when History will only be existing in its department like a Bill Board that shows the direction to a destination but does not move towards that destination.

In a place like the College of Education, Port Harcourt, History is combined with Social Studies for students to study. The reason is so that when employed the graduate teacher can have an alternative subject to teach when History is not offered in such a school. Of course, as a student commented; 'history is very difficult, you need to quote exact dates and the dates are so many'. With this kind of erroneous notion, many students prefer to be committed to social studies as against History. This combination is not serving the interest of History, rather it works against it. History struggles to survive under such arrangements.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has asserted that history as a discipline is a highly rated academic discipline because of the rigorous intellectual demands it places on its practitioners. It asserts further that among all other academic disciplines, History is the pivot, since it is only History and historians that study the past and the origins of other disciplines.

However, inspite of the fatherly role history plays, it is facing extinction and struggles to survive. The study had discovered that, this problem is as a result of the unwholesome and un-nationalistic government policies on education, ranging from the placement of history as an elective subject in secondary schools, to inherited colonial educational legacy. Furthermore, employment policy on History teachers, admission requirements into History Department as well as the expansion of the Department of History to reflect a new status are equally affecting the fortune of History.

In addition to these, misconceptions about history, parental influence on their wards choices of subjects and courses of studies, which emphasizes Law, Sciences and Engineering as against History is also an issue. Also, teacher's attitudes to teaching, lack of teaching aids, reading materials like JAMB past question papers in History are all affecting its survival. Other factors are British colonial legacy which de-emphasized African History and sees it as a non-existing issue as against European and American histories which are glorified.

The paper believes that government policy towards history should change, in order to encourage Nigerian students to study it, especially Nigerian and African History. Parents should encourage their children to study History as a mark of patriotism to their country just like the American and British citizens. It is also, high time that Nigerians push aside the notion of British colonial educational legacy, so that the country can move forward. Perhaps the Olusegun Obasanjo's policy during his first tenure as President between 1999 and 2000 should be revisited. He at that time had asked, though verbally, the Minister for Education to work out the modality to make History compulsory to all Nigerian students. Or the 2016 Buhari's policy on Education made through the Federal Minister of education which asserts that History will henceforth the compulsory for primary school pupils and secondary school students. If these policies are implemented and other issues put in their proper perspectives, then History will be placed where it rightly belongs in the comity of academic disciplines.

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