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## RE-ECHOING THE PLACE OF HISTORY IN THE CURRICULUM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

This paper examined the place of History in the curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria. The paper argues that at the secondary education level, students are taught a variety of subjects that are supposed to help guide them in their future career and personal choices. It is during these teenage years of moving into adulthood that young people often take on their most formidable views and perspectives about the world in which we live. The objectives of the paper were to: highlight the significance of history in the curriculum of secondary education level, provide a brief on the obnoxious scrapping of history from the curriculum of secondary education, and consider the challenges of implementing the curriculum of history. The study which utilized published works and online materials established that the Nigerian government during the 2009/2010 academic session scrapped history from the curriculum of secondary education. The scrapping made history unpopular and pre-disposed to the danger of losing its hitherto privileged position. The study concluded that whether for career purposes or for curiosity's sake, it is important for people to have a basic understanding of what has driven, and what drives the world in which we live, hence the place of history in the curriculum of secondary education.

**Keywords:** History, Nigerian Schools, School Curriculum, Secondary Education, Students of History

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### **Introduction**

Controversies being generated by current debates over the authenticity and veracity of past events in the country tend to confirm the place of History as a veritable subject in Nigerian schools. It is such a pity that millions of Nigerian students had been denied the knowledge of the background and fundamentals of their country, courtesy of an obnoxious policy removing the History subject from schools' curriculum (www.guardian). While the huge misnomer has been corrected on paper through a reversal of the policy, it remains to be seen adequately reflected in practice. Events in the last few years have shown that a lack of a reasonable grasp of history will only widen the gulf of animosity. Furthermore, the fact that history keeps repeating itself in many aspects of Nigerian life, even as public officials and politicians conflict facts of history to manipulate citizens, has thrown the country into a crisis, a sad reflection of the poor state of historical knowledge amongst Nigerians. Based on the aforementioned statement, this study attempts an examine the relevance of history in the curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria. For ease of presentation, the entire paper is segmented as follows: Introduction, a brief on the scrapping of History from the curriculum of secondary education, Review of Related Literature,

aims of teaching history at the secondary education level in Nigeria, the place of History in the curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria, career opportunities for students of history, challenges of implementing the curriculum of History and conclusion.

### **A brief on the scrapping of History from the curriculum of secondary education**

The Nigerian government, during the 2009/2010 academic session, scrapped the study of history from primary and secondary schools' curricula. Official reasons as given then were, among others, that students shun the subject; only a few jobs were available for history graduates, and there is a dearth of history teachers. Seven years later, the government decided that the decision was wrong, and in 2017, the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) announced it was set to reintroduce history as a subject, beginning in the 2018/2019 academic session. The NERDC Executive Secretary, Professor Ismail Junaidu, had stated that the Curriculum would be standalone and would be taught from primary one to Junior Secondary School (JSS) III after the National Council on Education (NCE) had approved the reintroduction of the subject.

In 2018, the Federal Government unveiled a new curriculum for the teaching and learning of the subject in basic schools across the country. The new curriculum was approved at the 63rd meeting of the NCE, which was held in Kano in June 2017. Given the events that played out in the last forty (40) years, it would seem that the band placed on the teaching of history in Nigerian schools was calculated, deliberately or otherwise, to impose collective amnesia on the people and mentally dislocate Nigerians. The World Bank could not have meant well for the country when in 1980, it insisted on the restructuring of the educational curriculum on the pretext of non-viability of history as a course of study. Such a decision only prepared the ground for the economic dependence Nigerians have found themselves today.

According to Professor of Legal History at the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Dr. Akin Aloa: "A country without a sense of history is a soulless country. It could safely be said that many of the challenges facing state and nation-building efforts in Nigeria are a result of the neglect of history. The history of inter-group relations in Nigeria has confirmed the extent of interactions among Nigerian ethnic groups or nationalities long before the imposition of colonial rule. It would have been the duty of History as a subject in schools, to bring these truths to young Nigerians to influence their understanding of life and what roles they could play in cementing the relationship among groups" ( www.guardian ). The paradox is that countries that pull the strings at Brentwood's institutions did not and have not scrapped history as a subject in the educational curriculum of their countries. In fact, it is even made compulsory at freshman year in their universities. They are aware, like all visioners of powerful civilizations, that history is the bedrock of education, without which a country does not and cannot grow.

The return of history into primary and secondary schools has expectedly come with some enthusiasm. In furtherance of this renewed enthusiasm, compulsory but genuine teaching of the history of the country should be pursued as a matter of policy by the ministries of education, information, and culture and their parastatals. This is necessary to preserve the cultural and intellectual repositories of this country for posterity.

### **Review of Related Literature**

There are several previous studies that are relevant to this article titled: Re-echoing the place of history in the Curriculum of Secondary education in Nigeria. One of such articles is that written by Moga, (2020) titled "the relevance of Information and Communication Technology in teaching

and learning History in Public Secondary Schools in Nasarawa State. Moga, opined that individuals who are not historically inclined erroneously equate history with the past. For example, most people see history as a subject whose understanding is gained through the recall of facts rather than analyzing and critically sifting out information to really understand historical happenings. In other words, history is a story with a predetermined plot to be memorized but not interpreted. Charlse (2010) concurred and noted that constructivist research into students' historical thinking suggests that students perceive the learning of history to be the presentation of a uniform picture of the past. This perception often leads to make poorly informed choices about senior high school subjects, sometimes rejecting history because they are not clear about whether or not history would gain them a good tertiary entrance score or a lucrative job. Far beyond this perception by students is that this is not the case because the past refers to an earlier time, the people and societies which they inhabited over time and the events that took place there. What happened in the past is fixed in time and cannot be changed. In contrast, history changes regularly. The past is concrete and unchangeable but history is an ongoing conversation about the past and its meaning. The word "history" and the English word "story" both originate from Latin *historia*, meaning a narrative or account of past events. History is itself a collection of thousands of stories related to the past, told by many different people.

History is not mere story telling or a mere fabrication. History is an account of what actually happened in the past which has a link to what is happening at present and can help in planning or projecting for the future. In a nutshell, History is about yesterday, today and tomorrow (NTI, 2-3). Interestingly, each generation adds its own chapters to history while reinterpreting and finding new things in those chapters already written. (Adesote and Fatoki, 2013) on their part see History as the continuous interaction between the historian and his facts and an unending dialogue between the present and the past. It encapsulates the interpretation of traces or relics of the past in the light of the imaginary idea of the historian which is self-depending, self-determining and self-justifying form of thought. This connotes that the historian has access to the traces of the past in terms of relics, monuments and documents.

What is discernible from the above definitions of history as viewed from different perspectives by scholars is that even though history deals with human past, it requires analysis and interpretation based on evidences (historical records). An historian is the one that analyzes historical records. An historian is not usually in a hurry as he takes time to evaluate the necessary records or information received so as to come up with a balanced and acceptable account. An historian relies on different sources of historical information such as the written source, oral tradition, linguistics, ethnographic, archaeological sources just to mention a few examples.

Corroborating on the inclusion of History in the curriculum of secondary education, (Cobbold & Adabo, 2010) opined that history helps Nations to understand the positions they belong and the hopes of future based on the past. It provides the directions for Nations since it tells where the people are coming from. Also, history acts as a powerful capacity of dealing with issues of national identity which are not necessarily examined in other disciplines in quite such details. The study of history in secondary schools inculcates in the minds of the students the habit of not accepting explanations on their face value but to identify the roots of happening thereby promoting better understanding. Asides, the study of history helps students to know more about themselves by promoting their understanding of the past, in terms of both internal and external relationships. This is quite relevant to the present as it provides a guide on the section of the relevance of History in secondary school level.

Hendriawan (2019) in his paper titled “High School History Education and Education for Sustainable Development: An Integrated Curriculum Approach” sees Sustainable Development as an effort to regulate the primary, secondary and tertiary needs of humans in utilizing various existing natural resources, but still taking into account the environmental aspects for the needs of future generations. According to the authors, Education for Sustainable Development and learning of history subject in secondary schools always face obstacles in terms of understanding the concept of education as limited to the transfer of knowledge. Therefore, the effort to improve students’ historical competence for sustainable development is one of the main choices in achieving the objectives of history instructions, which is more specifically referred as historical competence. If history is well studied, students will cultivate habits of critical thinking through experience in analyzing and interpreting facts or historical evidence. The learning experience gained by students can improve their high-level thinking skills, which is a skill needed as members of the community. The authors maintained that the Education for Sustainable Development content in high school curriculum is still not visible, both in the form of curriculum content and in the implementation of education in schools. The authors concluded that Education for Sustainable Development possesses every potential to be adopted into the high school history curriculum especially those related to the socio-cultural dimension which consists of competencies to preserve the socio-cultural environment and to preserve socio-cultural diversity. While the authors specifically addressed High School History Education and Education for sustainable Development in Indonesia, the thrust of this study is **Re-echoing the place of History in the curriculum of secondary Education in Nigeria**. This is a point of departure hence a vacuum to fill.

In their submission, Pallavi, Jyotrimayee and Harichandan conceptualized History as the analysis and interpretation of the human past which enables citizens to study continuity and changes that are taking place over time. It is an act of both investigation and imagination that seeks to explain how people have changed over time. To these authors, historians use all forms of evidence to examine, interpret, revisit, and reinterpret the past. These include not just written documents, but also oral communication and objects such as buildings, artifacts, photographs, and paintings. History is a means to understand the past and present. The different interpretations of the past allow us to see the present differently and therefore imagine- and work different futures. While the authors based their submission on the concept of history, this study captures also the challenges of implementing the curriculum of history in secondary schools. This is a new gap that stands different from works carried out by these authors.

In his view on the definition and importance of curriculum, Mizanur (2022) defines Curriculum as the academic content and lessons taught in a school or educational institution or in a specific course or program. It is a set of standard-based experiences in which students practice and master information and skills. On the importance of Curriculum, Mizanur opines that Curriculum serves as a primary guide for all educators in terms of what is required for effective teaching and learning, ensuring that every student has access to challenging academic experiences. To effectively support instruction and learning, the curriculum must include the required goals, techniques, materials, and assessments. This is very apt because in teaching and learning History, the required goals, techniques, materials, and criteria for assessing students are well embedded in the curriculum, hence Mizanur’s work is an inspiration to the present study.

In the words of Anwaar (2021), a Curriculum is the tool in the hands of the artist (teacher) to mold his material (pupil) according to his ideas (objectives) in his studio (school). It is the vehicle

whereby and through which we hope to enable children to achieve the objectives of education. It is a written document that systematically describes goals planned, objectives, content, learning activities, evaluation procedures, and so forth. On its relevance, Anwaar opines that curriculum compliments an interwoven network of physical, social, and intellectual conditions that build and reinforce the behavior of individuals, and take into account the individual's ideas and interpretations of the environment in order to reinforce the learning objectives and facilitates the evaluation procedures. Anwaar's explanation of the concept of curriculum is seminal to this write-up because evaluation characterizes teaching and learning history as embedded in the curriculum of secondary education.

Poonam (2022), sees curriculum as specific lessons and academic content taught in schools and educational institutes for a particular course or program. In relation to development, Poonam opined that Curriculum development encompasses the step-by-step process of designing and improving the courses offered at schools, colleges, and universities. Even though each institution has its own process, the broad stages of the framework consist of analysis, design, implementation, and evaluation. A few of the commonly used techniques include need and task analysis, objective design, choosing appropriate teaching and learning methods, and forming the curriculum committee and curriculum review committee. Poonam's idea on the conceptualization of curriculum provides an impetus to the choice of this topic as the major elements mentioned are always considered in the development of the curriculum of History at the level of secondary education in Nigeria.

#### **Aims of teaching History at the Secondary Education level**

Pallavi, Jyotrimayee, and Harichanda(nd.) identified the following aims of teaching History at the secondary education level:

- i. To promote an understanding of the process of change: History is the only subject that can unfold the process of change and development through which human societies have evolved to their present stage of development.
- ii. To acquire knowledge of significant world events: The pupils through the learning of history get the knowledge of happenings outside the life of the nation which are significant to the life of the world as a social group or significant to some happening in the life of the nation (such as French revolution, the Industrial revolution, etc.).
- iii. to promote an understanding of the common roots of human civilization: All major civilizations of the world have common roots, leaving aside some major local characteristics; most of them have common features which point to the basic unity of mankind. One of the important aims of history is to point to this basic unity.
- iv. To develop an appreciation of the contributions made by various cultures: The cultures of different countries have contributed in one way or the other to the total heritage of mankind. History can bring this to the knowledge of the pupils and that is to be understood and appreciated.
- v. To develop an understanding of causal relationships: By understanding the causal relationship between historical happenings, pupils may be able to have some insight into the process of framing historical laws and utilizing them for prediction. For example, from the facts studied in history regarding the French Revolution they may be able to conclude that other things being equal, when the social, political, and economic frustrations of the general mass of people in a social group reach an unbearable point, revolution is bound to break out. With this law as the

basis, the pupils may discuss, whether India has reached the point of revolution at the moment or not and what India might do to avert a revolution.

### **The place of History in the Curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria**

The importance of history in the curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria is as presented below:

History promotes the spirit of patriotism in students (Charlse,2010). Through the teaching of history, young ones are educated about past activities of some people to equip the rising generation with the skills it needs if the life of the society is to be carried on. The history teacher is in an excellent position to inculcate the spirit of patriotism in pupils' minds. Life stories of great saints, heroes, and reformers, like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sir Tafewa Balewa, Shankaracharya, Buddha, Rama, Maharana Pratap, Guru Nanak, Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Madella, etc. encourage pupils to be truthful, courageous, just and selfless. Such an education, indeed prepares people to die for their nation in one way or the other. It also compels people to contribute their quota in nation-building since the lessons in History unearth the enormous contributions of their forefathers. History therefore unfolds important stories of people who can serve as role models and as the basis of proper decision-making for peoples' lives (Cosmas and Charlse, 2010). This can be achieved through the teaching of national history with a focus on the nation's heritage- its origins, growth, and achievements. The development of reasoning ability; The activities involved in the study of history also develop the reasoning ability of the learner. History provides skills such as thinking critically about documents, cause and effect relationships, and the ability to read and summarize material. Critical thinking skills are what learners need in order to work through, articulate, and argue in support of their own positions on matters that concern them. Such activities cause the individual to be engaged in both inductive and deductive reasoning which in turn develop the reasoning ability of the person. Such ability helps learners to understand themselves better and then develop the ability to understand and respond to other people. The skills of analyzing, comparing, interpreting, evaluating, and drawing valid conclusions enable students to function creatively and positively in their jobs, as well as in their labor unions, companies, and professional organizations among others. These educational and life skills are not only important for the individual but are also essential skills if learners are to participate actively and capably as citizens in this democratic era. Without the social awareness and analytical skills that learners can develop through the study of history, they will forever remain vulnerable to propaganda, and political manipulation (Cosmas and Charlse, 2010).

As a subject of study and as an intellectual means of political, social, and economic development, history is viable, not just for mere certification, but rather on its significance for intellectual rebirth and cultural revival that will enable the country's educational system to enrich the mind of young Nigerians. Proper historical awareness will enable every Nigerian to know that the country belongs to all and not just to a set of mischief-makers attempting to falsely rewrite history; thus creating room for a better understanding of Nigeria. History guides learners to see trends and processes in a broader, holistic perspective and to understand them. Through history, they come into contact with other cultures and societies and in this way, they can gain a more holistic understanding of the contemporary world and their place in this broader context.

Obtaining knowledge and self-knowledge: The study of history does not only lead to acquiring more general knowledge but also self-knowledge. The quest for more knowledge can be satisfied

as learners can do their own investigations and in the process acquire self-knowledge. Opinions and judgments must be based on knowledge obtained through investigation and verification and not perceptions. Personal-individual investigations provide the opportunity to develop skills in working with abstract concepts and analyzing knowledge. One needs to have self-knowledge in order to know and understand others and thus the study of history should not be just for the sake of acquiring general knowledge.

**Critical awareness and thinking skills:** History can contribute towards the development of critical awareness in learners, as there can be no quest for truth unless it is sought in a critical way. Learners need to be guided to be intellectually curious, to question trends and occurrences in a positive manner, to weigh up both the positive and the negative aspects and to distinguish between facts and generalizations. It is through the curriculum that the teacher is faced with these challenges to develop such a critical awareness and History can make a contribution in this regard (Aren, 2009).

**Perspectives:** History can guide learners to see trends and processes in a broader, holistic perspective and to understand them. Through history, they come into contact with other cultures and societies and in this way, they gain a more holistic understanding of the contemporary world and their places in this broader context. This will prompt them to ask, for example: How do I fit into the big picture of a nation that is characterized by diversity of such an extensive nature?

**Self-understanding of existence:** People are the result of their history. Learners must be able to comprehend where they come from and develop an understanding of their existence. As Dwako (2007) puts it, history helps nations to understand the positions they belong to and the hopes of the future based on the past. The cultural identity of nations is thus inherent in the history of every nation. It provides directions for the nation since it tells where the people are coming from. This understanding can be the platform for decisions about political inclinations and for future actions of a more general nature. At the same time, school history has a powerful capacity to deal with issues of national identity which are not necessarily examined in other disciplines in quite such detail. Thus, everything about the nation is informed by history.

**Explaining and understanding the present:** The present can be better understood by studying the past (Elton, 1967). Making links between the past and the present can enable one to gain a broader and more holistic perspective and understanding of the past. In this way, learners can come to a greater understanding of current events or conditions by investigating how conditions developed over the years. Therefore, learners can have a better understanding of how technology developed, how it impacts mankind, and how it affects their own lives at present. From the above, one can deduce that learners can thus develop certain historical skills to study the past in order to understand the present.

**Predicting or forecasting the future:** History assists man in getting a better grasp on the present, as an understanding of history helps one to make better judgments and predicts the future as the past can act as a guide for the future. There is however doubt whether the future can indeed be predicted. There are, however too many variables, since societal, economic, political, and cultural temporal conditions may change and there is no certainty that things will happen the way they were planned. The past may assist one in gaining better insight and understanding contexts, but it is generally impossible to forecast situations and outcomes accurately. Yet, insight into the past provides guidelines for future decision-making.

The study of History helps us understand change. This is because history is full of transitions that have altered the world's story. Therefore, through the knowledge of History, citizens are made to

understand more about what created our present-day society. Arguably, studying the American civil rights movements shows individuals how people organize successfully against oppressive systems. Again, learning about the fall of Rome teaches individuals that even the most powerful society can fall apart and what happens to cause that crumbling (Mooc Block Team, 2021). In fact, the past creates the present. It is only by understanding those events can individuals in society know how we got here, and where to go next.

History is premised also on the need for proper documentation for Nigerians from all walks of life, even if palatable. When history is defective in content or form, it can be corrected, as Nigerians have done in the past. Importantly, it will enable people to move on and solve problems with due regard and dignity to the people.

Source of values: one has to make value judgments in society today because certain norms and values apply. The study of history can assist learners in determining what these values are and assist them in making the required value judgments, based on an analytical and objective process. Without telling learners what is right and wrong they are guided to make their judgments (Carl, 1991).

### **Career Opportunities for Students of History**

Like other subjects or disciplines, "history indeed can and does prepare students for the labor market". The list of career opportunities for students of history is unquantifiable. It includes **Museum researchers**. Some of the larger museums, such as the British Museum and the Imperial War Museum employ history graduates with knowledge of specific periods of history as researchers. There is also career opportunity for graduates of history as **Media Researcher**. Historians can be employed as program researchers at reputable organizations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). A subject-based degree, such as history, may be more useful than having studied media production skills. With the increasing public interest in tracing ancestors and researching family histories, historians can be employed to render services as genealogists. Graduates of history are also employed as museum curators working in a small local authority or University museum with variant roles such as collection management, staff management, exhibition management (including hands-on installation) and museum education and required business awareness (career-advice.jobs.ac.uk). In most recent times, with the rapid expansion of tourism, historians are employed to work at tourist sites to perform a range of roles including; steward, manager visitor services, or heritage interpretation- in costume or demonstrating craft skills to school groups or the public. Also, opportunities exist for archaeologists in excavating or assessing sites prior to building work as part of the local authority planning process, as with University departments, museums, and heritage agencies. Historians also have career opportunities of being employed to work in Archival centers for the preservation of vital historical documents. For example the National Archives Kaduna (NAK).

In the current labor market where emphasis is placed on workplace or on-the-job training, all employees, irrespective of the disciplines they pursued in school, are given some induction and training. This occupational socialization even widens the labor market for the graduates of history, making them fit and work effectively and efficiently in any establishment.

### **Challenges of Implementing the Curriculum of History**

With the teaching of history, among other subjects, a number of problems often arise which affect the adequacy of instruction that students receive. One of these problems; a major one to boot is



the number of unqualified teachers in the secondary education system. With an ever-expanding population in this country, more and more schools are being built, and therefore many more teachers are needed to fill these classrooms in an effort to meet societal demands on education. With a serious shortage of qualified teaching personnel, emergency credentials are often given to those newly graduated college students who have absolutely no teaching experience. Drastic times call for drastic measures, but these emergency steps may end up causing problems for both the students and the teachers. The more prepared and qualified a history teacher is, the easier it will be for him or her to convey historical information to the students. This will then help increase students' enthusiasm for the subject in general.

Another fundamental challenge that confronts the implementation of history in the curriculum of secondary education in Nigeria is Religious or Social Bias. Pallavi, Jyotrimayee, and Harichanda (nd.) argued that most teachers suffer from such a bias, and anyone suffering from it cannot provide the correct knowledge of history. If an Islamic Religion Studies (IRS) teacher is fanatic and has racial bias he may hardly teach the history of the Muslim period correctly and impartially. He shall definitely be dishonest in teaching because it would be quite difficult for him to explain how the Muslims pondered over some historical issues for example; Jihad. A similar situation will exist for teachers of other religions.

Aside from religious bias is the issue of National Bias. In the teaching of history, national bias is as harmful as religious or racial bias. "My country, right or wrong" is a condemned slogan. Patriotism has great virtues and one should be patriotic but patriotism and national bias have different meanings. A true patriot sees and confesses the weaknesses of his country while a person who has national bias cannot do this. A teacher of history suffering from national bias shall never explain before the children the weaknesses of his country.

If a history teacher in Nigeria has a national bias, he shall not explain to the children that the British were able to have their rule in this country due to the weaknesses of his own countrymen. On the other hand, he will tell the students that there were no weaknesses in Nigerian traditional rulers and it was the mere cunningness of the British that they dominated over the Nigerians. A history teacher should be patriotic but he should never have national bias, he should try to develop the international understanding in himself and his people.

Faulty Method of Teaching; In our country history is generally considered to deal with dead princes and bygone events and such a teaching will become lifeless. However, history is a living subject as it deals with 'drama of the human beings or the stage of the world which is still growing on. This drama should be presented before the children in a vivid manner in class-room. For this a history teacher should be active and full of life.

Lack of Correlation; most of the teachers teaching history fail to correlate history with other subjects. Since no subject can be taught in isolation so history should never be taught in such a manner. It is always possible for the history teacher to correlate his subject with geography, Civic Education, Economics, craft, Government, Social Studies or any other subject.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear from what has been discussed so far that in spite of the unfortunate circumstances that have characterized history as a school subject, it has not outlived its importance as an academic subject worthy of contributing to knowledge and to personal and societal development. In fact, whether it is used for career purposes or for curiosity sake, it is important for people to have a basic understanding of what has driven, and what drives, the world in which we live in.

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