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## **The Restoration of History to Its Deserved Position in Nigeria's Educational System: A Compelling Need Met?**

**Ajayi, Adegboyega Isaac, PhD**

Department of History,  
Adeyemi College of Education,  
Ondo, Nigeria

Tel: +2348023771996

[ajayi\\_gboyega@yahoo.com](mailto:ajayi_gboyega@yahoo.com); [gboyegaajayi57@gmail.com](mailto:gboyegaajayi57@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

In this study an attempt has been made to trace the travails of History as an academic discipline in the educational system of Nigeria from the colonial days to the present. In the process it was established that it suffered neglect and nearly went into extinction before it was restored into the primary and secondary school curriculum in 2017. And its teaching has since commenced in September 2018. The roles of critical stakeholders and other concerned bodies in the restoration process are discussed along with the government initiative that brought back History. Ordinances, government policy papers, conference and seminar papers, newspapers and other secondary materials that are broadly relevant are judiciously utilised to establish the indispensability of History in the school curriculum of any nation that aspires to grow and develop in a healthy atmosphere.

**Key words:** Restoration, Government Response, Eclipse, Advocacy, Culture, Tradition, Military.

### **Introduction**

History as an academic discipline has been exposed to several vicissitudes in Nigeria from the colonial days to the present. These ranged from its manipulated and highly limited curriculum in the colonial days to several impious experimentations through government policies in the post-independence years. In fact, at a time the situation became so grave that not only was it partially eclipsed by some sister disciplines it nearly went into extinction (Ajayi 1996). It was removed and replaced by other subjects at the primary and lower secondary school levels and made elective subject at the senior secondary level. The ripple effect at the tertiary level was understandably low patronage by students because they had been denied the much-needed

foundational exposure at the lower levels (Ajayi, 1996). It took the spirited efforts of the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN), History of Education Society of Nigeria, Nigerian Union of Teachers, prominent historians and scholars, the print and electronic media etc. for History to be restored to its pride of place in the curriculum at the lower levels (Primary and Secondary) of Nigeria's educational system. Pressure from these agencies, the crises and contradictions that have been tearing the country apart over the years; and government belated conviction that the problems of the nation can be ameliorated through a recourse to widespread study of History, especially that of Nigeria and Nigerians, were obviously important factors in government's re-appraisal of its apathetic disposition to the subject. Even during the colonial period, the colonisers recognised History as a potent tool for imbuing in the colonised 'moral rectitude', socio-political cohesion, nation building and patriotism (to the colonial empire), by situating it appropriately in the nation's educational system through the Education Ordinance (Omolewa, 2014). Howbeit, the emphasis was predictably on English History in the belief that the colony was an appendage of the metropolis (Omolewa, 2014).

The point that is being underscored here is that even colonialists appreciated the utilitarian value of History as an academic subject. This utilitarian value of History had been well explained by noted historians, Oloruntimehin (1976); Akinjogbin (1977) and further explored and firmly established by younger scholars – Alao (2018), Ogbogbo (2018) just to mention a few. What can be distilled from the works of these and other authors on the subject range from conceiving History as discursive engagement with social reality, culture and traditions; the integrative potential of knowledge of History; the inseparable nature of History and Society; the multi-faceted nature of History to the appropriation of a multi-disciplinary treatment of African knowledge production in seeking solutions to local issues in contemporary times. In all of these, History has emerged as an indispensable tool for a nation that aspires to grow and develop in a healthy atmosphere, if properly comprehended and judiciously utilised for that purpose. As observed elsewhere: "no nation has, and could ignore History without serious consequences. Even in the technologically advanced countries of the world, the citizens are still encouraged to study their National Histories and the unfolding Histories of their relations with the rest of the world. Nigeria cannot afford to be different" (Ajayi, 1996, p.5).

The travails of History as an academic subject in Nigeria's educational system from its limited focus to near extinction before being properly restored constitute the focus of this study. Government ordinances and policy papers, conferences and seminar papers, pronouncements of relevant professional bodies and education agencies as well as scholarly works yielded the facts that are interpreted and marshalled to establish how the government was virtually compelled to restore History to its pride of place in Nigeria's educational system. This is undertaken under the following broad themes (outside of the introduction):

- 1) Initial Government Response: From Enthusiasm to Apathy;
- 2) The Partial Eclipse of History by Sister Disciplines;
- 3) The Restoration of History to the Primary and Secondary Schools' Curricular;
- 4) Extant Realities and History's Continued Relevance; and
- 5) Concluding Remarks.

### **1. Initial Government Response: From Enthusiasm to Apathy**

As alluded to in the introductory section above, the colonial authority in Nigeria encouraged the teaching and learning of History in the Primary and Secondary Schools in recognition of the utilitarian value of the subject. The Education Ordinance made provisions for this

(Omolewa, 2014). Understandably the emphasis in the curriculum was English History, and African and Nigerian History were not reckoned with. Obviously, this was to indoctrinate young Nigerians to learn only about European History and thereby ensure their perpetual subjection.

Specifically, through the late 19thC to the mid-20th Century English History was an important subject in Nigerian schools. In fact, in 1890 it was among the subjects selected for the assessment of secondary school performance in Nigeria by the British Examination Board (Omolewa, 2014). The subject thus received adequate attention and support of the colonial administrators. And in the 1950's when the nation was preparing for independence the scope and coverage of the subject was widened to include nationalist themes like: Pre-colonial Nigeria; Nigeria in the 19th Century; Historiography, etc. After independence in 1960, Nigerian governments continued to sustain and even enhance the status of History by: (1) making it compulsory in the Primary and Secondary Schools; (2) establishing and funding Historical research schemes (e.g. the Yoruba Historical Research Scheme put in place by the Awolowo Government of Western Region); and, (3) facilitating the collaboration of the Department of History, University of Ibadan with the West African Examination Council (WAEC) for the deepening of the History syllabus with massive dosage of Nigerian and African Historical realities (Omolewa, 2014).

But, beginning from 1969 History began to experience reversal of fortune as a result of government policy somersault and apathy. For the records, the National Curriculum Conference was convened by the Federal Military Government (FMG), in 1969 to review the educational system and its goals; and, identify new national goals that would determine the future and orientation of Education in the country. The outcome was the adoption of a National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1973 which stipulated that History should be an optional subject in Primary and Secondary schools. This marked the beginning of the decline in the teaching and learning of History (Ogbeche, 2015). The revised National Policy on Education that followed and which came into effect in 1981 did further incalculable damage to the subject. This new document, which placed much premium on Science and Technology, relegated Arts subjects to the backwaters. For instance, at the Primary School level History was replaced with Social Studies and Civics; and the same fate befell History at the Junior Secondary School level. While at the Senior Secondary level History, Literature-in-English and Geography were included in the core subjects' column but only one of these can be chosen by the students (NPE, 1981, pp.12-18). This led to the scrapping of History as a standalone core subject in 1982 (Ezeh, 2018). It was only at the Senior Secondary School level that History and the liberal Arts have a measure of recognition. But it should be noted that only very few 'daring' students could take up History at that level having been denied the proper grounding needed at the lower (foundational) levels.

The resultant effect was the pegging down of the number of students going into the Arts at the university level in conformity with the Federal Government admissions ratio of 60:40 in favour of the Science-based disciplines (Ajayi, 1996). Government's over-romanticisation of Science and Technology dealt a death blow to History and other liberal Arts subjects. While one is not ignorant of the developmental potential of Science and Technology, sustainable development can only be assured in a mutually inclusive manner; for as Ayandele, (1968) has affirmed:

No sane person would challenge the contention that in order to catch up with the developed part of the terrestrial globe, Nigeria should be transformed by Science and Technology. But to be blind to the seamy side of a purely technological civilisation, which seeks to satisfy exclusively the materialist aspirations of society; to be oblivious of the fact that science cannot educate

the total man; to be unaware that the well being of man can best be guaranteed only when he is primarily human—a purpose which the humanities enable man to fulfil, would mean putting Nigerian society on the incline plane (Ayandele, 1968, p. 3)

The situation was worsened for History in 2007 when the new Basic Education Curriculum for Primary and Secondary schools was launched by the Obasanjo administration. The justification for this development was the belief in government circles that the existing curriculum was deficient (or shallow) in the areas of human capacity development, poverty eradication and the quest for total emancipation (Leadership Newspaper, 23 Jan. 2018, Editorial).

It, therefore, came up with the new Basic Education Curriculum to be operated at three levels: lower level (Primary One to Three); middle level (Primary Four to Six); and upper level (JSS One to Three). In this dispensation History was completely delisted as a stand alone subject and merged with Social Studies (Ezeh, 2018). This came into effect when the new curriculum was launched in 2010 and it sounded a death-knell for History.

## **2. The ‘Partial Eclipse’ of History by Sister Disciplines**

The endangered status of History played into the hands of sister disciplines with overlapping areas of inquiry, like Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, Social Studies and Civics, to seize the centre stage and start making bold contributions to the national debate in order to ensure their continued relevance. The misconception of the essence and role of History in the society did not help matters. In fact the poor grasp of its militaristic value has been creating the impression that History as a field of study is static, time-specific and uninterested in extant realities, (Ajayi, 1996). But it should be noted that History is only interested in that past that would help enliven the present, for as rightly submitted by Carr, (1961) “there is a continuous dialogue between the present and the past with the eyes on the future” (Carr, 1961, pp. 22-25).

It has been established that the “subject matter of History is human life in its totality and multiplicity” (Meyerhoff, 1959). This therefore makes it imperative for “the historian to study and interpret the changes embodied in society and explain the reasons for them” (Oloruntimehin, 1976). In other words the intellectual engagement of History “should be helping the nation, whatever nation, to find its soul” (Akinjogbin, 1977). It is against this background that Akin Alao (2018) rationalised the frequent engagement of Nigerian historical scholarship with the twin concepts of “Continuity and Change” and “The Past in the Present”. This, of necessity, makes History inquisitorial, expository and indicting if and when conscientiously utilised. And of course, this generates fear for the subject, especially among leaders (Civilians and Military) who have ‘skeletons in their cupboards’. For such leaders and their ilk, since the subject cannot be easily manipulated to ensure their positive projection it could as well be dispensed with. It is our belief that this was partly responsible for the derogation of History as a subject in Nigeria’s educational system since the coming to power of the Military in 1966 (Falola, et al, 1994; Ajayi, 2007).

It should also be noted that until recently many historians have been avoiding writing about or getting involved in national debates on contemporary issues of national importance in the mistaken belief that such belong exclusively in the realm of Journalism. Ikime (1989) admonished and pleaded with historians not to

be deceived into thinking that the primary responsibility for rescuing History lies with policy makers... the primary responsibility lies with us. Let us get vocally involved with all national issues, the key to the understanding of which

lies in History. Let us seek to prove that History is relevant even in the contemporary situation (Ikime, 1989, pp. 24-25).

Clarion calls such as this and the ensuing assertive advocacy campaigns by historians, professional bodies and other stakeholders compelled the government to have a rethink and eventually restore History to its pride of place in the educational system as will be established in greater details in the succeeding section.

### **3. The Restoration of History to the Primary and Secondary Schools' Curricular**

We have established in the preceding section that government came up with a policy which ensured the removal of History from the Primary and Secondary school curricular in 1982 and this subsisted until September 2018 when it was restored. The campaign for its restoration was multi-dimensional robust and unrelenting. And, it was spearheaded by professional historians who used the platform of the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) as the rallying point as well as arrow head of the struggle for its restoration (Ogbogbo, 2018). Apart from direct face-to-face interactions with relevant government officials, other avenues usefully exploited are collaborative seminars, conferences and workshops featuring other critical stakeholders and relevant professional bodies. HSN was not alone in the struggle. There were also other concerned professional bodies. For instance, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) seized the opportunity of the 2015 World Teachers' Day to make a declaration for the reinstatement of History in the schools' curriculum. Earlier at the 2014 conference of the History of Education Society of Nigeria, Michael Omolewa in a lead paper titled: "Assault on the Teaching of History in Nigerian Schools" called on policy makers and all stakeholders to appreciate the importance and utilitarian value of History in the overall development of the nation by restoring it to its pride of place (Omolewa, 2014).

We must also recognise the catalytic role of the news media (print and electronic) in the actualisation of the 'Bring Back History' advocacy. For instance, the Editorial Opinion of The National Newspaper of June 12, 2014; titled: "Help... History face Extinction in Schools" roundly condemned the removal of History as a core subject in the schools' curricular and called on the government to quickly rectify the anomaly (*The Nation*, June 12, 2014).

The concerns expressed by stakeholders, professional bodies at different fora since the mistaken removal of History from the school curriculum in 1982 eventually elicited positive action from government (outside the usual placative rhetorical pronouncements) in 2016. In fact, the frequent (oftentimes avoidable) crises and contradictions bedevilling the nation which are symptomatic of a distinct lack of historical consciousness starkly exemplify the indispensability of History in the development of multi-ethnic polities like Nigeria. Flowing from the above, the F.G. initiated a Ministerial Strategic Plan to be executed between 2016 and 2019. Among the several initiatives and activities to be executed are the disarticulation of History from Social Studies and its re-introduction as a stand-alone subject to be taught at the Primary and Secondary Schools. Suggested concepts for the new curriculum for History include: Origin of History and Peopling; Heroes and Heroines in Nigeria; Political Developments in Nigeria; Geography and Environment; Economics and Trade; Cultures and Customs of Nigeria. This initiative received the approval of the National Council on Education (NCE) at its 61<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Session in September 2016 (Daily Post, 27 March, 2018). As a follow up, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) was saddled with the implementation of the policy initiative. By July 2017, sufficient progress had been made by NERDC, who had assembled a team of experts and other stakeholders to produce the new curriculum for the NCE (Nigeria's highest education policy-making body) to give approval for the re-introduction of History to Primary and Secondary schools as a core subject, during its

63<sup>rd</sup> meeting held in Kano in June 2017. Thereafter NERDC forwarded a sample of the new curriculum for History to the States in order to give them ample time to plan ahead of its implementation slated for the school year commencing in September 2018 (Aluko, 2018). It is gratifying to note that the curriculum is now being implemented in the Schools nationwide as planned.

#### **4. Extant Realities and History's Continued Relevance**

The success of the 'Bring Back History' advocacy should not lull Historians, History Teachers and Students into complacency for there are daunting extant realities that could negatively impact its teaching and learning. Some of these are: (i) inadequate competent teachers as a result of the neglect of the subject over the years; (ii) dearth of relevant textbooks and low quality of some of the Texts available; (iii) obsolescent teaching methods aids and equipment; (iv) underfunding of Universities and other teacher training institutions, which has been adversely affecting service delivery and carrying capacity. These challenges are by no means exhaustive. They are merely the critical ones that require urgent attention for this redemptive measure to be sustainable. Specifically Teacher Education programme in History should be expanded, reinvigorated and modernised through provision of modern teaching aids and equipment (audio-visual and ICT-driven). This will make teaching more lively and learning more permanent for the teacher-trainees. Without doubt adequate funding by government is critical to the realisation of this objective. The parlous state of the institutions presently gives cause for apprehension.

This leads us to the critical roles of Teachers of History and Professional Historians in this new dispensation. They are to complement government's efforts in the areas of proper utilisation of available material resources and regular improvisation where and when necessary. They should also prioritise the production of relevant and qualitative Textbooks based on the Teachers' Guide for the 'New 9-year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC)' provided by NERDC. It is gratifying to note that the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) has already come out with the publication of Nigerian History Series Textbooks for Primary Schools in Nigeria (Ogbogbo, 2018), while an Ibadan-based publishing outfit, Evans publishers has recently concluded a similar exercise for the Primary and Secondary School level. But in view of the need to cater for anticipated increase in pupils enrolment; and, the increasing popularity of the subject, these initial efforts will not suffice for long.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

A discursive analysis of the travails of History as a school subject in Nigeria (colonial and post-colonial periods) engaged my attention in this paper. In the process it was established that History enjoyed a measure of recognition through proper placement in the school curriculum in the colonial days (albeit with exclusive emphasis on English History) and, the immediate post independence period with a more diversified nationalistic curriculum. Its neglect started under the military dispensations when it was subsumed under Social Studies and Civics, a situation which persisted till 1982 when it was completely expunged from the Primary and lower Secondary School curriculum. And that it was not until September 2018 that it was fully reinstated by government as a result of the combined forces of robust advocacy, strong public opinion and the belated realisation of the cardinal role that History could play in facilitating national cohesion especially in a diverse nation like Nigeria. The Minister of Education, Alhaji Adamu Adamu, remarked, during the inauguration of the New Curriculum for History and its release to Primary and Secondary Schools nationwide for teaching, in September 2017, that History would be used as an instrument for national integration and nation building (Punch, 30 March, 2018). The point must be strongly emphasised that it is not just enough for government

to restore History to its proper place, the gesture should be followed up with adequate provision of all that would be needed to make it thrive and thereby serve the purpose for which it was restored among other salient virtues.

More importantly, historians and other concerned stakeholders who fought the ‘titanic’ battle for its restoration must sustain government interest in the subject. This can be done through unalloyed commitment to its survival; diligent and objective handling of the subject; bold and incisive contributions to national debates; and frequent intellectual engagement with government and its agencies on diverse matters of national significance. It is not only expedient but equally necessary for the critical stakeholders and government to enable History perform optimally in the overall interest of the nation. It is our belief that this long awaited step taken in September 2018 is in the right direction. However the compelling need of putting History in its appropriate place could only be consummated if its current status is fully reinforced and sustained.

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