

Nigeria's National Policy on Education and the University Curriculum in History: Implication for Nation Building

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Abstract

The paper reviewed the post-colonial education delivery and the emergence of Nigeria's National Policy on Education, stressing a more proactive approach to the teaching of History in secondary schools and universities. The practice in Nigeria had been to promote the teaching of social studies and relegate history education because the teaching of social studies was considered a viable option for the achievement of cohesion among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The intensity in ethno-regional polarisation was an indication that different strategies used by government to resolve this ethno-regional problem had had no effect. The paper argued that the only option left for government was to recourse to history, as the situation tended to suggest that Nigerians' problems stemmed from lack of historical consciousness. The adoption of history as an approach to achieve nation-building in Nigeria could only be meaningful if a modest teaching technique such as critical thinking was used in the classroom. Nigeria's efforts at nation-building could effectively be anchored on the knowledge of the historical antecedents of Nigeria's current travail.

Keywords: post-colonial education, ethno-regional problem, nation-building, historical consciousness, curriculum.

1. Introduction

The colonial education which was inherited by Nigeria was criticised for being too theoretical to be able to make meaningful impact on the life of Nigerians (Akinlua, 2007). Subjects taught in schools reflected the taste of the colonial education officials; hence school curricula were built around the existing colonial values. Students were supposed to mimic their teachers in subject like English Language which involved demonstration of competency. The same problem which informed dependency on past colonial education relics seems to have continued till date. Woolman (2001: 41) was forced to comment on issue of this sort in his remark about African education. According to him, "African school systems today still follow the rigid structure of time periods and grade-level progression found in Western education." Where there is little change in the curriculum, it is either one subject is substituted for the other or dropped outright. This is the case with the study of History which has almost lost its place to Social studies in school curriculum.

The National Policy on Education provides in the curriculum of Junior Secondary school in Nigeria the teaching of Social Studies. The policy makes provision for six years of primary school, three years of junior secondary school, three years of senior secondary school, and four years of university education (6.3.3.4). In the first tier of this programme, students learn Social studies while in the senior secondary school, the second tier, students may choose either History or Government as one of their Arts subjects. Government now promotes the learning of Social studies, a junior class subject, above the study of History with the notion that the study of social studies is needed for the understanding of Nigerian cultures. Perhaps the reason for this action is that the cultural diversities in Nigeria will best be understood by young Nigerians when they learn these diversities in social studies. Ironically, Nigeria is currently facing the problems of ethno-religious crisis, political instability, insecurity, economic strangulation, environmental degradation and many others. Many of these problems, which may be connected to past actions of average Nigerians, arise because Nigerian leaders and policy makers do not see how the past can help to make the present, and shape the future. This paper examines the need for the teaching of History in Schools especially now that

Nigeria is desirous of solving its ethno-regional crisis, religious violence, political instability and insecurity and others. It reviews the post colonial education delivery and the emergence of National Policy on Education, stressing a more proactive approach to the teaching of the subject, and to reinvigorate its teaching in schools in order to achieve nation-building.

2. Post-Colonial Education Curriculum and the Emergence of National Policy on Education in Nigeria

The National Policy on Education otherwise referred to as the 6-3-3-4 approach was operationally introduced into Nigeria's education system for the first time in 1982 (Nwagwu, 1982). The basic rationale for the policy was the observed irrelevant nature of Nigeria's existing system of education. Traditionally, in Nigeria the argument has been that the education inherited from Britain was exotic, bookish and consequently insensitive to Nigeria's immediate social and community life. The curriculum at all levels of the education system was more in tune with European environment than to the African setting. The content of subjects like Geography emphasised the studying of capes, bays, fjords and several other foreign features not experienced in the Nigerian or African landscape. History programme of study was stuffed with stories and analysis of European wars, reigns of monarchs and national treaties that had very little meaning and bearing to African mind.

The trend was equally observed in the nature of the colonial educational system where emphasis was placed on the production of an elite group that shunned manual and practical work available in their immediate communities. The labour department in Nigeria in 1954 lamented this trend in its annual report:

many young people seem prepared to wait indefinitely for a particular type of employment on which they have set their hearts (usually clerical) rather than accept alternatives (Federal Government of Nigeria, Annual Report 1954: 7-8).

School Certificate holders were said to constitute 59 percent of the unemployment people in Nigeria.

Lugard (1965) had however pointed out that the main purpose of Western education was to produce clerks and interpreters to aid the administrative machinery of the imperial overlords. To Akinlua (2007: 95) this type of education was not "founded on realistic philosophical principles", while Marinho (2009) had the feeling that though the frame of reference for curricular content was localized, other relevant issues such as models of learning and teaching were based on the British system. On the other hand, Ayandele (1966) had documented the extensive impact of Western education on Nigeria's social and economic life. The main manifestation of colonial education system in Nigeria was unprecedented rural-urban migrations and unemployment problems. The rural-urban movements eventually led to a gradual collapse of the cultural and economic life in rural areas, reminiscent of the imagery in Oliver Goldsmith's poem, the Disserted Village. The upwelling of people in the few urban centres also resulted in urban induced problems including crime, unemployment, poor health, slums and ghettos. However, against the background of this educational heritage, it had been pointed out by Nigerians for instance, Majasan (1967) that pre-colonial traditional education in Nigeria was relevant in scope, content and methods to the development and cultural life of Nigerians. On the other hand, Akinlua (2007: 95) submitted that "the pre-colonial education is the best". Ociti (1973:105) quoted in Marah (2006) contended that "before the advent of the Europeans African indigenous education was quite adequate in so far it met the requirements of the society at the time." Scanlon (1964: 3) also quoted in Marah (2006: 17) argued that "the education of the Africans before the coming of the European was an education that prepared him for his responsibilities as an adult in his home, his village and his tribe." Nevertheless, it was precisely to redress the problem of the inappropriateness of the education system in Nigeria that efforts were made to effect changes in Nigeria's education system in post-independence period.

Within the first two decades of Nigeria's independence, the education system and policy were characterised by series of committees and conferences. Concrete steps toward curriculum reforms started in 1966 by the National Education Research Council (NERC) under Chief Awokoya (Sofolahan: 1987). In September, 1969 the curriculum reform conference was held with discussions on appropriate curriculum contents and problems in Nigeria. Further conferences in 1973 led to the production of the National Policy on Education in 1977, 1981 and 2004. The production of this document and the eventual take-off of the policy in 1982 in some states of the country, marked the end of the post independence piece-meal and rather disjointed adjustments to the colonial education heritage bequeathed on Nigeria. It is doubtful if this colonial

education heritage has been discarded since for Akinlua (2009: 3) issues such as models of learning and teaching were still based on the British system. The same issue has equally been expressed by Akinlua (2007: 99) when he said “while the content of curricular kept changing from time to time, structure and practice remained stagnant.” One of the enduring features is the emphasis still placed on the importance of examination and certification as a measure of assessing pupils in the learning process.

The main aims and objectives of Nigeria’s education policy arising from the 1977, 1981 and 2004 editions are as follows:

1. the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity
2. the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individuals and the Nigeria society
3. the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
4. the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society.

The objectives of secondary school education are also clearly identified in the policy. The national policy objectives are:

1. preparation for useful living within the society; and
2. preparation for higher education (National Policy on Education, 2004: 13)

In order to meet the requirements of education for relevance, useful living and prepare products of the secondary school system for higher education the secondary school curriculum in the various subjects was reviewed. Unfortunately, however, the university system in Nigeria probably arising from its semi-autonomous status remained largely unaffected by the wind of change in the other (lower) levels of the education system. What happens at the last three decades in the secondary school has relevance for University education for a number of reasons:

1. In the last three decades when the National Policy on Education was introduced many products of the Senior Secondary school system who were admitted into the university had graduated in their various academic programmes. The secondary school system is therefore an important preparatory ground for the students who would act as input into the University system. In this regard, there should be relevance, for example, between History that is taught/learnt at the secondary school system and the curriculum in History at the University level.
2. Teacher education programme has not been effectively done to take into cognisance the changing nature of the education system in the last few decades. Teacher preparation and university instructional programmes for secondary school teachers-to-be must be relevant to the teaching/learning situation in the secondary schools given the prevailing challenges in the world today.
3. University Lecturers must be aware of the curriculum requirements at the secondary school system so that they can adjust their instructional strategies to take cognisance of the demands of the secondary schools.

3. The Senior Secondary School History Curriculum

The Nigeria senior secondary school curriculum in history is available in a package prepared by the Nigerian Educational Research Council. Current effort is not directed at reproducing the document within the limited space and time but to highlight the direction of the content. The objective of the syllabus is to afford the students the opportunity of learning about the history of their own country as well as Africa and the wider world. There are some other minor objectives derived from this primary aim directed at enabling the students to appreciate the origin of their people, understand the basic differences among people, and develop analytical minds to know the principles that govern human behaviour, as well as develop students’ interest in the subject.

Following these objectives, two subject areas are recommended for study, namely, 'Nigerian History' and 'Africa and the wider world since 1800.' The writing panel noted that there was a present bias for local history since

For too long the nation has put up with a situation in which over 95 percent of those who have passed through secondary and higher education had no knowledge of the history of their country (NERC, : 111)

Briefly, the syllabus is arranged as follows:

Year 4

History of Nigeria up to 1800

West and North Africa

Year 5

Nigeria in the 19th century

East and Southern Africa

Year 6

Nigeria in the 20th century

Africa: General

The examination and evaluation of the subject is based on 40 percent continuous assessment and two papers on 'Nigeria history' and 'Africa and the wider world' are taken. The examination contains both objectives and essay type questions.

4. The University Curriculum in History

At the initial stage, the Nigerian University curriculum in History emphasised the teaching of old empires in the Sudan and the forest belts and a consideration of British Colonial policy and rule. Today, the University curriculum in History in Nigeria appears to be sufficiently wide in both range and scope to be able to cater for the requirements of the senior secondary school history syllabus. Courses taught include Nigerian, West African, African and World history. However, the wide coverage appears to screen specific local requirements for topics on immediate communities, especially now that Nigeria is making efforts at achieving nation-building. Even when Nigerian history is taught, the contents of these courses have not emphasised in detail elements of the required local history as in the senior secondary school syllabus. The following three areas demand attention which should perhaps be examined with a view to introducing them as specific courses.

- (1) Inter-group relations: Trade and trading associations in Nigeria: crafts and craft making (pottery, salt making, leather making, iron working, tin works, gold mining, soap making, weaving, carving, bronze casting. The trade, political cultural implications and inter-group relations should be observed. The title of such a course could be "Local trade and Crafts in Nigeria".
- (2) In most Universities offering history in Nigeria, the courses on Nigerian history are appropriate and relevant. However, there is need for a new course to cater for specific needs of the senior secondary school history especially its details and intricacies since independence. Given the challenges Nigeria is facing in its attempt to achieve nationhood, emphasis should be placed on the following topics which are in the senior secondary school history syllabus. They should be treated as a compact body of knowledge- "Nigeria Local History since independence":
 - i. The first republic 1960-1966
 - ii. The coups d'état, military rule 1966-1978.
 - iii. Nigerian Civil War and efforts at reconciliation and reconstruction
 - iv. The Second Republic 1979-1983
 - v. Developments in Nigeria since 1983
 - vi. Military rule in Nigeria.
- (3) There should probably be a separate course – "Nigeria and the wider world" which will treat ECOWAS, AU, Commonwealth, UN and EU. The courses being suggested above should be made 'required', if not compulsory. If they are required, every student would have to take them before they graduate.

5. Methodology Requirements

History does not fall within the group of traditional empirical and practical subjects like the sciences. However, the history requirements and strategies for the senior secondary school are pushing towards making the subject more analytical and practical. Indeed, this notion tends to represent Cole and Barsalou's (2006) view when they suggest the use of open enquiry and critical thinking as a major approach to teaching history. Thus for Cole and Barsalou (2006) "approaches that emphasise students critical skills and expose them to multiple historical narrative can reinforce democratic and peaceful tendencies in transitional societies emerging from violent conflict." On the other hand, Bruno-Jofre and Schiralli (2002: 120) seem not to be comfortable with the use of general skills in teaching history because for them they "effectively displace genuine historical content, especially if the history-specific inquiry- elements are insufficiently engaged." However, they recommend 'inquiry model' where students "attempt to understand the meaning and significance of past events through the process of historical inquiry" (Bruno-Jofre and Schiralli 2002:120). Nevertheless, a good History teacher at the senior secondary school class still needs to emphasise practical work by way of projects. Most of the topics in the senior secondary school are introduced by analysis of location and geography of the places being studied. Even when the history teacher is not a geographer at the senior secondary school, he/she is expected to be able to draw sketches in order to emphasise the implications of the location of the kingdoms and factors being presented. The foregoing trend has implications for the preparation of the history teacher at the university level.

1. Traditionally, lecturers present basic principles at the classroom level and expect students to read up more details on their own. However, emphasis on projects and practical work has been minimal. Except in the final year project, the content in each course is often not designed to enable students embark on mini projects and independent studies. The fact and analysis may not be enough in the treatment of historical events. Finding out the process of bronze casting in old Benin Empire, methods of tin extraction by the Biroms and other groups on Jos Plateau in Nigeria, the principles and methods of pottery work in Nok culture, enquiring about the historical significance of Osun-Osogbo festival in Nigeria will be additional exercises and projects to enrich the History lectures at the University level. Except a student undergraduate knows these processes, he could be a poor teacher when these topics are taught at the secondary school level.
2. Excursions by history students to places of historical importance seem to be an additional method of making history a practical subject. Undergraduate students should as a necessity and before the end of their courses in history be opportune to visit the historical and cultural venues discussed in their history lectures. Excursions to places like Kano, Benin, Jos, Oyo, Badagry, for example, will supplement the various experience which students had acquired in the classroom situation. It is believed that when graduate teachers of history know such places they would be able to describe them better and even take their students out to such places.
3. Perhaps, more than before, the history teacher in our secondary schools will have to be prepared or at least sensitised to the processes of presenting information in graphical or visual form. History is about peoples' interaction with the geographic environment. Knowledge of the locations of places being discussed is important both to the undergraduate students as well as the secondary school pupils. It may be important to history teachers at the University level to bring maps of, for instance, Mali, the Sudan, Maghreb, the Nile basin, South Africa and so on to show the importance of the location and the influence of these places on the historical event being discussed. Cole and Barsalou, (2000) however, caution in the use of graphic photographs, documentary films and firsthand accounts in classroom particularly to young students in areas prone to crises, for instance, Plateau State in Nigeria. It is often said "strategic location" was a factor in the rise of old Ghana. Indeed, the trans-Saharan trade routes were important in the history, inter racial relations and interpretation of some events in the Sudan and North Africa. It will be important to treat the related events along with the map of these places. Products of places discussed in History could be mapped

by pupils in the secondary schools. What is important to the University teacher is that undergraduate historians should be sensitised to the relevance of maps in the analysis of historical events. Drawing of the physical map of Nigeria, the Sudan, a pie graph on the products of the Sudan, the Nile Valley within its products and location of the main pyramids are worthwhile exercises to prepare the senior secondary History teacher in Nigeria.

6. Implication for Nation-building in Nigeria.

Since the end of the Nigerian civil war, Nigeria has moved from one crisis to another owing to contradictory steps taken by past governments. Perhaps the most serious problems in Nigeria today which have made nation-building a mere construct are the issues of ethno-regional affiliation and religious crisis. According to Omotola (2010: 135) the issue of ethnic politics in Nigeria started with 1964 election when Nnamdi Azikiwe was denied of the premiership of Western region after his party, NCNC in alliance with UPGA and some elements of AG won the election. Subsequent political activities that followed this action were tailored towards ethnic mobilisation. The political party formation in the second republic in Nigeria followed ethnic affiliation and suspicion among the two leading ethnic groups, Igbo and Yoruba became intensified. Subsequent party formation has continued to follow this trend- Yoruba elements affiliating with political parties based in their region, the same with Igbo and Hausa. In the North, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) paraded a large number of the Hausa or Fulani stock; there was the Nigeria People's Party (NPP) in the East whose composition was basically Igbo and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) whose members were predominantly Yoruba.

At present the same ethnic affiliation seems to be guiding the structure of the political parties in power in Nigeria. The South Western Nigeria has six states including Lagos. Five states in the region fall under the administration of Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), a party which claims to share ideology with UPN while the sixth state, Ondo falls under a minority party, Labour Party. This same ethnic affiliation has equally informed the formation of parties across the different ethnic groups in Nigeria given the impression that ethnic loyalty takes precedence over national loyalty in Nigeria's political experiment.

The ethno-regional divide which was supposed to have gone with the creation of States between 1967 and 1996 now defines Nigerian national identity. Since the nation does not have a common denominator, for instance, national dress or culture, to which Nigerians can identify themselves most Nigerians prefer to seek socio-cultural relevance in their root. What exists in Nigeria today, according to Iwilade (2007) is a conglomeration of mutually exclusive social groups with fixations on primordial bonds that drive them to violent civil conflict and deep suspicion.

Thus the intensity of ethnic mobilisation in Nigeria makes the teaching of History especially in Secondary schools imperative. The need to expose students to the History of ethno-regional consciousness and the subsequent mobilisation which has become a fashion in Nigeria becomes more urgent. The formation of socio-political groups such as Igbo Youth Congress (IYC) Odua People's Congress (OPC), and Arewa People's Congress (APC) (youth wing) which represent the triadic ethnic groups in Nigeria is an indication that the current efforts at nation-building require more than the radio jingles many Nigerians are familiar with. In which case, Nigeria needs more than mere slogans and jingles to be able to weld together the pervasive cracks seen to be conspicuous in its political structure. This paper suggests recourse to the teaching of history as a viable option in the current efforts at nation-building.

The main reason the teaching of History is being considered a viable option may be found in Bandyopahyay and Green's (2011, 2-9) report on the policies of nation-building in post-colonial Africa. In this report nine nation-building policies in post-colonial Africa, namely, changing state names, changing capital cities' names and location, changing national currencies, conscription and national service, religious and linguistic homogenisation, republican and centralisation policies, one-party states, non-ethnic censuses and land nationalisation were considered for possible use to help nation-building. They examined each of these policies to see their contributions to nation-building in some countries in Africa. Their findings suggest that the "nation-building policies do not promote political stability and may in some cases even promote instability, as for instance in the positive correlation between higher levels of education and ethnic violence" (Bandyopahyay and Green, 2011:19). They went ahead to argue that "promoting political

stability in Africa is a long and difficult process and is not one that can be easily achieved through select policies” (Bandyopahyay and Green, 2011:19).

Nigeria offers a typical example of a country where almost all but one or two of these policies were tested and failed. Shortly after the Civil War, Nigeria introduced a number of policies in its nation-building efforts. Some of these policies were: changing the capital city’s location, for instance, the capital moved from Lagos to Abuja in the heart of the country, changing national currency. e.g the former British currency (pound and shillings) were replaced by the country’s Naira and Kobo. Among these policies is also the conscription of youths for National Service, a programme specifically designed to achieve cultural integration among the different ethnic groups in the country. Nigeria equally develops a language policy that compels Secondary school students to study one of the major languages outside their ethnic root, and primary school pupils are to be taught in their language of immediate environment, while it forbids any allegiance to a national religion. Other major policies are centralisation of certain institutions even when the country pretends to be operating federal constitution, non-ethnic census to avoid disintegration and land indigenisation policy. These policies evolve because they were thought to be capable of knitting together the diversities inherent in the country’s political structure. Nevertheless, ethnic consciousness and mobilisation have rendered the policies ineffective. This paper believes that the only option left for Nigeria in its bid for nation-building is to go back to its history, something that has effectively done in some country in the world. Omotola (2010:145) succinctly explains the steps taken by Nigeria to achieve nation-building, namely;

- (a) constitutional adoption of secularism which seeks to promote a culture of religious pluralism, and
- (b) federal character principle which seeks to promote ethnic pluralism through balancing of ethnic representation in government establishments at all levels.

These efforts have had little or no effects on nation-building in Nigeria.

At present the issue of nation-building is contentious in Nigeria. Bandyopadhyay and Green (2008) explain nation-building in terms of “‘nation integration’ in societies with multiple ethnic, religious and racial cleavages.” Gambo defines it as a process of socialising the people politically into becoming good citizens of the political order and making them feel they have a stake in the community worth fighting for. It may be difficult for Nigeria to weld together its different ethnic groups owing to what Mustapha (2006: 46) classifies as the problem of ethnic mobilisation. The most challenging issue today is suspicion among the three major ethnic nationalities and this is best illustrated by the view of some individuals from Southern Nigeria who contend that the federal structure as presently constituted in Nigeria does not allow each region to develop at its own rate. Indeed, this feeling from a section of the country constitutes a wrong signal which is capable of destroying the corporate existence of the country. Perhaps the teaching of History may help to reduce this tension.

Nigeria needs its past to be able to forge ahead in order to build a nation out of its diversified ethnic groups. The essence of teaching history in schools, therefore, is to achieve national integration and in the case of Nigeria to reduce tension among the various ethnic groups in the country. In 1975, Kenya resorted to using education to promote nation-building while President Samora Machel was said to have promoted a new nationalist ‘People’s History’ through efforts to not only collect local histories but emphasise their national communalities (Sanghamita and Green). Atofarati (1992) seems to capture the mind of the Nigerian leaders when he says that “the Nigerian authorities believe that the past can be ignored, that no mistakes of the present can be as serious and grievous as the mistakes of the past.” A similar view has equally been held by Cole and Barsalou (2006) in their remark about the teaching of History where they contend that “in much of Africa and in post-Shining Path Peru, for example, history, social studies, humanities are relatively low priorities in education, with more emphasis on subjects seen to have practical values, such as foreign languages, math, science, technology, and vocational training.” For them history education would have served as potential for schools to promote social reconstruction in society.

At present Nigeria is trying to promote social reconstruction through transformation project which involves the use of jingles, rallies and propaganda. Gambari (2006) believes that Nigeria may go beyond the present approach (use of jingles and rallies) to reconstruct its society by taking a trip to the past in order to improve the understanding of the present, examine the present with a view to gaining insights into the future, anticipate the future in order to better prepare for its many challenges. This is where the study of History becomes inevitable if the country intends to weld together the ethnic cracks in the society.

Ironically Nigeria does not see the need to promote the teaching of history in secondary schools. Its teaching in the tertiary institutions is more academic than practical to life as the contents of what is taught and the approach to them hardly relate to the life experience of the people. Atofarati (1992) believes that Nigeria's unwillingness to promote the teaching of history in secondary school rests on the belief "that the past can be ignored, the present is what matters, that no mistakes of the present can be as serious and grievous as the mistakes of the past." Nigeria's inability to mend its cracks and weld together its numerous ethnic groups is an indication that slogans, jingles, propaganda, transformative agenda may not work. History is about memory of the past, and as Oyerami has rightly puts it, history is having memory and being able to build a future from the memory. Its teaching is essential in Nigeria schools, at least if only to arrest the drift in Nigeria's political life.

7. Conclusion

Nigeria's educational system does not depart markedly from its British root, at least in contents and structures. A new curriculum which was formulated to address this problem did not achieve any result. The teaching of History which is supposed to be promoted to help in the area of historical consciousness is relegated. Strategies used to weld together the different ethnic groups in Nigeria have proved evasive. It thus appears that recourse to history becomes the only option left for Nigerian government, if only to avoid disintegration.

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