

IS HISTORY ON THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN NIGERIA?

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INTRODUCTION

The Conference Theme: “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Building the Future of Social Studies” make me to want to ask the Question: Is History on the School Curriculum in Nigeria?

There is no place one can ask this controversial question, except at a conference of Social Studies Educators. Your reactions and comments will go a long way in contributing validly to the debate going on the State of History in Nigeria Educational Institutions.

In October 2016, The Nation, Newspaper of Sunday October 9, 2016 featured an article titled “Applause as Federal Government reintroduces History in Schools”.

I have just returned to Nigeria from my three years stay at University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. It was a colleague of mine with whom I worked more than twenty-five years at the Faculty of Education, University of Lagos, Akoka who sent a text message to me asking if I had got a copy of The Nation, Newspaper. I was just coming out of the Holy Mass on a Sunday morning and standing at a Newspaper stand. The Nation, happens to be one of the four papers, I used to buy on Sundays with The Guardian, The Punch and The Tribune.

I got the copy of The Nation and quickly opened for the article written by Gboyega Alaka with this opening:

“With the recent pronouncement by the Minister of Education to return History as a subject into schools’ curriculum, stakeholders have been reacting”.

On the page where the story appeared, he featured the pictures of pupils in a classroom, Adamu; the Minister of Education and one Alao.

I read the story and I did not want to be emotional about it but I wanted to read more of Public Reactions to the story. I must quickly add that “The story of our Time, must be told by the people who were there”.

Why I was waiting for the Public reactions was the word “Applause”. Who gave it and where? The only reaction of note then was the “News and Current Affairs’ Commentary” by Olusola Otunuga” Re-Introduction of History to school” on World Today on Radio Nigeria, Ibadan on November 03, 2016 from (12.20p.m to 2.24p.m). The highlight of his commentary was that history was concerned with recording events in a chronological order and that history encompasses all disciplines.

He went on to say that history was expunched from school curriculum in Nigeria in 2007 and final removal in 2009/2010. He must have had his own sources but to say subjects in the Nigerian school curriculum were at one time or the other ‘expunched’ or “removed officially” need further clarifications. He however went on to add that NERDC (Nigerian Educational and Research and Development Council) has been mandated to introduce History as Core subject to school so as to enable children know their past.

THE STORY OR THE HISTORY

Now I may highlight the content of the story that led to “applause”. The opening paragraph gave the background. However he highlighted “10 reasons to study History” and however went on to put “History vs Civic Studies/Social Studies. His source for 10 reasons to study History was said to have been quoted from Dr. Akin Alao of Legal History at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. His comparing History vs Civic Studies/Social Studies was not quoted, may be it was his own making.

Now, I just hope that our politicians will not make us to believe they can “pad” subjects to school curriculum as we are told they are doing to annual budget. Introducing subjects to the school curriculum follows due processes of Curriculum Development.

In 2004, I was the Chairman of “a group of experts put together” by NERDC in their Headquarters in Abuja, where we were told to disarticulate some contents in social studies and put together as contents for what they called then:

- ◉ Religion and National Values
- ◉ CRS - Civic Education
- ◉ IS - Social Studies/Security Studies

After three days of serious work, we members of the panel were told that whatever we have done, they wanted us to say they were introducing these new “titles” not subjects in the school curriculum in place of SOCIAL STUDIES.

And we were to make the pronouncement at the end of our stay putting the contents together. They saw our reactions and they became uncomfortable with us. Finally they told us “it was the order from above”.

Then our debate changed tone, because we were now to argue to convince the people that put us together that as far as we were concerned, they were in charge of curriculum Innovations, Development and Implementation and there should be ‘no order from above’, from anywhere unless they have forgotten their roles they diligently and academically performed over decades since The National Curriculum Conference of 8th - 12th September, 1969.

The incident reported above briefly became a concern that was addressed by Professor Ogunyemi of Olabisi Onabanjo University in the 69th Inaugural Lecture of the University in December, 2014. Ogunyemi expressed

“much of the confusion about social studies/citizenship education are products of politics and a reflection of the dilemma of a leadership that has lost grip of its curriculum compass”.

In his September 22, 2016 Lecture at the Department of Arts and Social Science Education, University of Lagos, Obebe reminded his audience of what Late Emeritus Professor Ade Ajayi said on the introduction of social studies to our school curriculum in 2004 Convocation Lecture, University of Lagos, titled: “History and Society” on Tuesday 7th December, 2004 that:

“We all point to the introduction of Social Studies in JSS Schools in place of History and Geography as the major blow to the teaching of History in schools which has affected the inflow of students to read History in the Universities. In fact, the problem was with the historians who looked on when Social Science People hijacked the teaching of social studies in schools exclusively for their NCE and B.Ed students with no acquaintance at all with historical orientation.

We have since discovered that the real damage is not that so many students leave school without basic facts of their history. The real damage is that so many students leave school without learning to think in terms of the sequence of time”.

Professor Jide Osuntokun, another noted historian in his series in The Comet, in 2002 identified:

“time past” is part of “time present” and “time present” is part of time future”

In other words human society is one long continuum and to appreciate the present, one must know what happened in the past. Human societies have undergone and are undergoing continual changes in response to various forces. What historical understanding does for any society is to place its predicament with national and time perspectives of human evolution.

With reference to the last statement, I plead with my audience to look for the following:

- ◉ “Octogenarian (+) “comment in the Punch of October 23, 2016 page. 53.
- ◉ Hear what my friend 80-years-old Denis Okoro has to say on Education in Punch of October 23, 2016 p. 53.

Whenever I see him at recent conferences and seminars, I pity him and people like him for all they have done for us. He is one of those who had spent his productive years in the Ministries of Education in Nigeria.

- “1966 coup caused Nigeria’s problems - Prof. 80” Punch Oct. 02. 2016 page 53.
- “Opinion” Education and Development in Nigeria: Memo to Buhari The Guardian Thursday August 25, 2016, page 18.
- “Cross roads”: “What Nigeria means to me” Ruben Abati: The Guardian, Sunday October 2, 2016, p. 11.
- Politics: “People against anti-corruption war afraid of Buhari” Akin Oyeboode - Punch, September 19, 2015 (p. 14).

- ◉ Education: “A curriculum review and its ranging controversy “ by Iyabo Lawal of The Guardian June 29, 2017, (p.35).
- ◉ New curriculum highlights anti-graft teaching Vanguard, Thursday Sept. 01, 2005 (p.55).
- ◉ Applause as Federal Government reintroduces History in schools The Sunday October 9, 2016 ((p. 21).

All these newspapers materials I have assembled for readers as I was looking for answers to the question “who gave the applause’?

CURRICULUM IN THE SCHOOL

And back to the topic of introducing subjects to the school curriculum, not “padding”, there are rules and regulations that must be understood and carefully followed. If history becomes a “Core” subject as it was highlighted, the following questions will be asked:

- ◉ Where are the teachers to teach the subject?
- ◉ What will be the curriculum content of the subject?
- ◉ Where are the textbooks and the teaching materials?

Those of us who participated in preparing social studies teachers for schools in the Western Zone in the 1980s through the Institute and Faculty of Education, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife would recollect our experiences in bringing teachers to the campus during their long vacations from their schools. Our experiences too in working with NERDC for years with committed Directors at that time knew what it was to be committed to a good cause in promoting “Learning to be”.

(iv) What are the roles of subject Associations in our schools e.g. The Social Studies Association of Nigeria, Geographical Association of Nigeria and Historical Society at the various stages in our Educational Institutions in Nigeria as well as other subjects Associations?

CONCLUSION

This 2018 Annual Conference of Social Studies Association of Nigeria has Fourteen (14) sub-Themes and I believe within the next three days each sub-theme will be adequately addressed in the sub-groups where the sub-themes are presented. But for History which this Lead Paper has addressed, the Social Studies Educators must be ready to play a leading role in bringing about the teaching of history if it is finally decided to be a separate subject in the school curriculum.

Since, man is the centre of study in social studies, we have to start with ourselves. We may need to look critically at the Expanding Horizon Social Studies Curriculum from United States of America where Social Studies has taken deep root over the years. A Dominant pattern noticed in the 80s shortly before “A Report of the Curriculum Task force of the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools titled: Charting A Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century” was released in November, 1989 and can be summarized thus:

- ◉ Kindergarten Class: Self, School, Community and Home
- ◉ Grade I: Families
- ◉ Grade II: Neighbourhoods
- ◉ Grade III: Communities
- ◉ Grade IV: State History, Geographic Religions
- ◉ Grade V: U.S. History
- ◉ Grade VI: World Cultures: Western Hemisphere

- ◉ Grade VII: World Geography or History
- ◉ Grade VIII: American History
- ◉ Grade IX: Civics or World Cultures
- ◉ Grade X: World History
- ◉ Grade XI: American History
- ◉ Grade XII: American Government

We are showing this pattern from the American school social studies programme to show how different subject disciplines have been incorporated in their social studies programmes. What is important here is the need for cooperative efforts of all concerned to enrich the social studies programme. This was what Emeritus Professor J. K. Ade Ajayi referred to in his 2004 convocation lecture which we have featured earlier in this paper.

I Thank You.