

CURRICULUM CHANGE: MAKING A CASE FOR HISTORY TO BE TAUGHT AT THE BASIC, SECONDARY, AND TERTIARY LEVELS OF EDUCATION FOR NATION-BUILDING, NATIONAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of calls for curriculum overhaul in the Nigerian educational system and Nigeria's quest for nationhood, this paper makes a case for reintroducing History as a teaching subject at all levels of Nigeria's formal education sector. The knowledge of history and its connection to nation-building is often glossed over, and it behooves history scholars to make the connection and provide the needed emphasis as to why knowledge of the subject is key to nation-building. For conceptual clarity, the paper outlines and defines key concepts, including history as a subject, curriculum change, nation, and national cohesion. It further outlines the factors driving Nigeria's call for a curriculum reset. It makes a case for history to be a standalone subject taught at all levels by outlining its importance. In conclusion, the paper advances reasons that make history important to nation-building, national cohesion, and integration. The methodology used for this academic essay is the Secondary Research Method.

Keywords: History, Curriculum Change, Nation, National Cohesion, Nigeria, Education Reform

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian State is in dire need of national cohesion and integration. The country appears not to have advanced beyond the geographical expression of the colonial masters who bulldozed and coerced our forebears into it. The citizens seem disillusioned, while the political class is united only in their greed for superintending over the sharing of the commonwealth of the people. The country needs patriots who have a sense of duty toward the nation. The surest way of building these patriots is through the classroom. However, from the country's state, one has no option but to conclude that the current curriculum is not doing so effectively, hence the need for it to be reviewed. The colonialists achieved the integration of the territories that presently make up the Nigerian State, but not the people or their minds.

The various calls for resetting, enriching, or outright overhauling of the entire curriculum have been louder recently. The loudest is the recent call by the House of Representatives, which asserted that the current curriculum is outdated at all educational levels. According to the Resolution, "the House is aware that the world is in flux, skills needed to thrive are constantly evolving, demanding a critical evaluation of the current educational system, and the traditional curriculum may not adequately equip graduates for the dynamic labour market. To bridge this gap, reviewing the educational programmes at all levels is essential" (Okeke, 2024). In light of the calls for curriculum overhaul or enrichment, the case for history as a subject to be taught at all levels is most suitable.

This paper believes that the role of historical knowledge in nation-building and forging national cohesion has been underplayed and largely unexploited; therefore, the importance of teaching history in classes at all levels of education cannot be overemphasised. What should be emphasised is teaching it at all levels of education. History has been among the core humanities at the centre of Nigeria's curriculum since colonial times. However, it became relegated and made optional as time went on due to several factors. The Government of President Umaru Yar'adua advanced the following reasons as to why History as a subject taught in classrooms should be underemphasized and eventually expunged from the basic curriculum: lack of interest by students, few jobs available to graduates of History, and scarcity of teachers in the field (Iremeka, 2022, p. 7). However, the same source concluded that there was an unspoken reason for removing

history as a subject from the basic curriculum. "It was learnt that the ruling class decided to jettison the subject to conceal certain elements of the nation's history considered ugly by young Nigerians. Of specific interest were the occurrences that led to the Civil War, the war itself, and its aftermath" (Iremeka, 2022, p. 8). Furthermore, the often critical stance of historians concerning government policies, as witnessed during the Babangida Regime, may have also contributed to the unspoken reason. Historians like the late Dr Bala Usman relentlessly criticised the regime for taking IMF loans and imposing its unfavourable conditions on Nigerians.

Factors that help develop a viable nation are not just economic but an interplay of several factors. Knowledge of history has been recognised as vital to nation-building. George Santayana, one of the important philosophical thinkers of the 20th century, once said, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Even though postmodernist scholars have recently criticised the subject of history, viewing it as an individual construct bereft of objectivity and construing history as a human construct that signifies and facilitates our understanding of the past (Agwanda, 2019), when you separate historical facts from opinions, such knowledge passes beyond the realms of human construct. After all, facts are sacred, but comments or opinions are free, as C.P. Scott observed. The knowledge of such facts should be the focus when making a case for history to be a standalone subject taught at all levels of education in the event of a curriculum reset. Objective knowledge of the past events of any country is crucial in nation-building. Even though the subject of history may not necessarily predict the future, it is like a signpost that tells you where you are coming from and the direction to take going into the future. To avoid the pitfalls of the past, a nation-state and its citizenry should make the teaching of history a prerequisite at all levels.

Granted, the call for a curriculum reset is largely driven by the need to accommodate the careers created as a result of technological advancement in Information Technology. However, consideration should also be given to better appreciating our diversity, as Nigeria has been in search of nationhood since 1960. Knowledge of history is pivotal in achieving national cohesion and integration. Therefore, making a case for History to be taught at all levels in the event of the reset is timely.

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

History

The word history is derived from the Greek word *historia*, which means to inquire. Everything on earth, material or immaterial, has a history that can be studied. History is vast as it spans beyond the present into the past, uncovering the activities of humankind in all aspects of social, political, economic, technological, cultural, artistic, religious, and scientific life at both local and international levels (Agwanda, 2019). However, as a subject or discipline, history has been concerned with peoples, civilisations, nations, and regions.

The subject of history has been defined in various ways; however, for this paper, the sentiment aligns with the definition by Professor Alan Munslow. He defined history as an academic discipline that uses a narrative to describe, examine, question, and analyse past events and investigate their patterns of cause and effect (Munslow, 2001). Key words in this definition are "narrative," "analyse," "investigate," "pattern," "cause," and "effects." When history is understood and taught with all these concepts in mind, it meets the criterion of objectivity. In studying history, we seek to understand the past and arrange the "facts" to explain the decisions and processes that shape our present reality to guide our responses to them (Morphakis, 2020). Answering the "why" and the "how" should be at the centre stage in history. Moreover, historical knowledge is key, as it provides a premise on which we understand our forms of government and the understanding that informed decisions require that the masses be rational and knowledgeable (Agwanda, 2019).

Curriculum Change

Just as human beings and their societies are dynamic and keep changing or evolving, the curriculum also

needs to be changed from time to time to accommodate the dynamism of human society. Curriculum Change is defined as the process of modifying, revising, and updating the content, structure, and delivery of a curriculum to improve the effectiveness of education and better align it with the needs of students, society, and the workforce (Jain, 2023).

The curriculum is an ever-changing document, and many factors usually necessitate change. Changes in the curriculum are assumed to be a complicated process that may involve all stakeholders within and outside the school system (Raphael & Dayo, 2022). The major triggers of curriculum change are social, economic, and technological changes, and the curriculum must be changed whenever there is a reason to meet students' needs (Dorgu, 2020).

Nation

The perception of the concept of "nation" varies among scholars depending on their standpoints. Over the years, the concept has been conceptually and empirically contested. It did not become a prominent concept until the late 18th century. However, for this paper, the most suitable definition is one that defines a nation as a social construct with an imagined identity that is historically contingent and distinctly a modern phenomenon that dominates the political sciences (Mylonas, 2023). A nation could refer to either an ethnic group or a state that one feels affiliated with or loyal to. It is instructive to point out that the latter is overtly political. There are many characteristics with which a nation is identified; however, the distinctive ones are population, culture, history, economy, territory, and identity. Loyalty to any of these attributes can be seen as nationalism.

National Cohesion

National Cohesion can be defined as a deliberate measure or step by a nation-state or an ethnic nationality to instil a sense of belonging and a shared vision and challenges. The outcome of the aforementioned process also encapsulates the definition. Even though every country or nation-state has its peculiarities, on a general note, the idea of national cohesion is to build a harmonious society reflective of equity, harmony, and justice for all, regardless of background. The importance of national cohesion is underscored in establishing departments, directorates, agencies, or commissions for National Cohesion and Integration in many countries. It has been observed that social, political, and demographic changes are already observable in most of Africa, and they hold out the possibility of national futures (Aryeet, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is defined, in this context, as the philosophical and theoretical frameworks that guide research (Hassan, 2024). The methodology used for this academic paper is the Secondary Research Methodology. This research method uses secondary material collected, collated, and easily accessible. This method is often inexpensive or free to access, and it can theoretically be exploratory or explanatory (George, 2024). Furthermore, this type of research often uses data gathered from published peer-reviewed papers, meta-analyses, or government or private databases (George, 2024). The choice of this research method for this academic paper is obvious: materials needed abound and are within reach on the internet, in libraries, and in private collections. Comparatively speaking, it is also cheaper to adopt.

FACTORS DRIVING THE CALL FOR A CURRICULUM RESET IN NIGERIA

As noted earlier, the curriculum is supposed to be as dynamic as human society so that we can keep abreast with an ever-changing world. There has been a clarion call for Nigerian schools to reset their curriculum to adapt to and meet global standards, as the country is currently ranked poorly. Based on Data Pandas' ranking of countries by education, Nigeria is currently ranked 150th with an index score of 0.310, below 26 other African countries. According to Success Olagboye, "The educational system in Nigeria, while possessing inherent strengths, faces significant challenges in keeping pace with the dynamic demands of the 21st

century. This shift is not merely an option but an imperative that demands attention and action" (Olagboye, 2024). Some of the reasons being advanced or factors driving the call for a curriculum reset are as follows:

Meeting Twenty-First Century Challenges

To meet twenty-first-century challenges through new resources such as skill acquisition, innovation, creativity, and new methods (Loveth, 2023). The current curriculum is generally tailored only toward the country's economic development. There have been concerns about its effectiveness and relevance in preparing students to face rapidly changing global challenges (Adeoye, 2023).

Colonial Legacy

Colonial attachments are still inherent in the curriculum, among many other areas. The current educational structure and content reflect colonial priorities rather than indigenous knowledge systems and national development objectives.

Focus on Rote Memorisation

The current curriculum focuses primarily on rote memorisation. The current curriculum has long been observed to emphasise memorisation, where pupils are seen more or less as depositories into which the teacher dumps information for eventual student regurgitation during exams. The Nigerian curriculum has historically been criticised for focusing on rote memorisation and regurgitation of facts rather than nurturing critical thinking skills (Kean, 2014).

Lack of Analytical Thinking

The curriculum hardly triggers the analytical mindset in students. Fostering critical thinking and reasoning is lacking in Nigeria's educational system due to the nature and content of the current curriculum.

Outdated Content

Many have voiced concerns that the materials taught have not been updated to reflect technological advancements, science, and global perspectives (Kenechi, 2024).

WHY HISTORY SHOULD BE A STANDALONE SUBJECT

In its search for social cohesion, a sense of nationhood, and in its experience with xenophobic occurrences, "the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) established the History Ministerial Task Team (HMTT) to oversee the implementation of compulsory History in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. The terms of reference of the task team include the strengthening of History content; a review of the content in the General Education and Training (GET) band; its implication for teacher education, professional development, and textbooks" (Davies, 2016). This was a result of the belief by the South African Ministry of Education that there is a correlation between the teaching of History and the search for nationhood.

History was once a core subject in our curriculum from primary to secondary schools; however, it was tragically relegated and subsumed into social studies at that level. Not much of what history was is included in the content of Social Studies. At the tertiary level, apart from history majors, Nigeria's, Africa's, and world history is often reduced to a module in the general studies course, which is hardly enough (Punch Editorial, 2022). So much so that you can hardly find the subject being taught in our schools, except in a very few, even in the few schools where it is being taught, you would only find very few students offering it because it has been made an elective and is considered difficult among the other electives with which it is paired. Since then, generations of Nigerian students have passed through primary, secondary, and tertiary education very ignorant of their cultural and political past, and it is the opinion of this paper that this situation partly accounts for why our primordial sentiments keep inflaming our political divides.

The subject of history is vast, and teaching it in its entirety would be an impossible task. However,

teaching and knowledge of political, contemporary, economic, and cultural history as it concerns a nation-state is essential in understanding that nation-state's developmental and survival trajectory. Whatever technological or scientific skills are acquired by the citizens of any nation for nation-building, the knowledge of the historical experiences of such nations is essential for understanding how such skills should be channelled to impact their development. Furthermore, as opined by Akanbi, "Knowing and learning about the history of anything guarantees a compelling connection between its past and its present, as this will enable laying a solid foundation for the future. Any nation that toys with history may be playing with its destiny. Worldwide, people learn a lot from the past; the lessons learned are to the extent the past is known, taught, and applied, and the lessons learned serve as a springboard for development in all spheres of life" (Akanbi, 2023 P). Therefore, the position of History as a subject in our curriculum should not be that of an elective or a module in our schools, but rather that of a compulsory, standalone subject like mathematics and the English language. As a subject, it may not be able to predict the future, but its knowledge and analysis are essential if past mistakes are to be avoided. In this regard, the subject should not only be taught but also be standalone.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY TO NATION-BUILDING, NATIONAL COHESION, AND INTEGRATION

Inculcation of historical knowledge is not a matter that should be handled with levity by any nation-state. Many European countries, including Russia, have long understood the importance of teaching history for nation-building, which is why it is a core subject. The importance of studying history abounds, but the following are key to nation-building, national cohesion, and integration:

Promotion of National Consciousness and Patriotism

The knowledge of history promotes national consciousness and patriotism among citizens. Awareness of our history can stir up a sense of patriotism, awaken national consciousness, and foster a sense of social responsibility that will affect national development as people internalise and institutionalise common beliefs and values without prejudice (Akanbi, 2018). According to Brett and Guyvers, "one of the core purposes of history education in most nation-states was as a unifying mechanism to prop up national identity and inculcate a common, shared national story" (Brett, 2021 P).

Understanding Identity

History provides valuable information about people and triggers informed appreciation of Nigeria's diverse cultures, languages, and pre-colonial political systems, which will foster cohesion and integration. Furthermore, historians have learned about how Nigeria was formed, how it has evolved, and the uniqueness of all the nationalities that make up the country. This will shed light on our cultural diversity, social dynamics, and geopolitical complexities (Writers of UoPeople, 2024), which will go a long way in stopping stereotyping and ethnocentrism in Nigeria. History can be used to build social identity, especially if, in a postcolonial situation, this means deliberately avoiding sharing a single uniform identity (Brett, 2021).

Understanding of the World and Its People

Nigeria, as a country, does not exist and will not develop in isolation. Through the lens of history, we can learn how past societies, civilisations, ideologies, governments, and technologies were built. Students can now learn about the pillars upon which different cultures were built, including cultures different from their own (Nord Anglia, 2023).

History Fosters Political Intelligence

Humans are political beings, and to engage in politics that would promote national cohesion and integration, the knowledge of history is important. It helps people take an active role in the political sphere through educated debates and refines people's core beliefs. Historical knowledge equips citizens with the analytical

tools to understand political processes, evaluate leadership decisions, and participate meaningfully in democratic governance.

Economic Development and Innovation

Historical knowledge provides insights into economic patterns, trade relationships, and development strategies that have succeeded or failed in the past. This understanding is crucial for informed policy-making and sustainable economic planning. Nations that understand their economic history are better positioned to avoid past mistakes and build on previous successes.

Cultural Preservation and Appreciation

History education ensures the preservation of cultural heritage, traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. This is particularly important for Nigeria, given its rich cultural diversity. Understanding and appreciating this diversity through historical context can reduce inter-ethnic tensions and promote unity in diversity.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's call for curriculum reform presents a unique opportunity to reintroduce History as a core subject at all levels of education. The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates that historical knowledge is not merely an academic exercise but a fundamental requirement for nation-building, national cohesion, and integration. The South African example illustrates how countries facing similar challenges have recognised the importance of mandatory history education in fostering national unity and social cohesion.

Nigeria's current challenges—including ethnic divisions, political instability, and lack of national consciousness—can be addressed through comprehensive history education that promotes understanding of the country's diverse heritage, colonial experience, and post-independence journey. The relegation of history from the curriculum has contributed to generations of Nigerians who lack a proper understanding of their past, making them susceptible to manipulation and ethnic tensions.

As Nigeria embarks on curriculum reform to meet 21st-century challenges, it must not overlook the fundamental role of historical knowledge in creating informed, patriotic citizens who understand their past and can contribute meaningfully to the nation's future. History should be reinstated as a compulsory, standalone subject from basic through tertiary education, ensuring that future generations of Nigerians are well-grounded in their historical heritage and equipped with the knowledge necessary for sustainable nation-building.

Nigeria should join other progressive nations in recognising that people without knowledge of their history are destined to repeat the mistakes of the past. History education is not just about the past—it is about building a better future for Nigeria.

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