Education and Sustainable Development: A Reflection on the Role of History Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper discussed the role of history teaching and learning in Nigeria toward achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria. Through careful scrutiny of official records from the Kano State Educational and Resource Development (KERD), analysis of West African Examinations Council results publications and secondary source materials, the paper notes a downward slide in historical scholarship with its negative impact on sustainable development. It examines the historical processes that were responsible for the neglect of teaching and learning of history in Nigeria. The paper also identified the role history had played and continues to play in Nigeria’s effort to achieve sustainable development. It argued that the practitioners of history and its advocacy should re-define the methodology and embellish the curriculum with important areas of concern such as information and communication technology, environment, agriculture, transportation and technological development. On a final note, the paper insisted that governments’ official disposition and orientation toward historical scholarship must change for the discipline to contribute to Nigeria’s sustainable development initiative.

Keywords: Education, Sustainable Development, Reflection, History.

Introduction
Education can simply be seen as the process of learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the society which one belongs. It could equally be regarded as the process by which desirable attitudes, skills, behaviours, and beliefs are acquired in order to make an individual useful to himself and the society which he lives (Gwani, 2010).

Sustainable Development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs (Ake, 1996). The idea was conceived in 1972 at the United Nations conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm to brain storm on the previous concerns raised on the activities of human on the planet. In 1992, during the UNs conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janaro, the concept became the platform for discussion. It was widely attended by over 100 Heads of States and representatives from over 178 national governments including Civil Society organizations. In 2002, another UN conference on sustainable development was convened at Johannesburg to assess the cumulative progress that had been achieved after the Rio de Janaro convention. It must be quickly added that sustainable development is not just all about environment. It is all encompassing. In the context of this discussion, the concept would be regarded as the totality of government’s effort to improve the wellbeing of the
citizens in Nigeria. It borders on good governance, good moral rectitude, and provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, good healthcare delivery system, accountability and good network of roads.

Reflection tries to mirror the role historical scholarship had played or would continue to play in sustainable national development if given the ideal recognition and support.

History is a conscious enquiry into the past activities of human societies for the benefit of the present and future generation.

Historical scholarship should be an instrument for sustainable development but the inability of Nigeria’s leaders to evolve a coherent policy for education and develop strategies for achieving set goals and objectives had dragged the nation back. A key element in these systemic failures in formulating sound policies could easily be discerned from the exclusion of history study from the curriculum of the Upper Basic and its ranking as an optional subject at the West African Senior School Certificate Examinations and National Examinations Council. Thus, the post independent period of Nigeria’s history has been characterized by abject poverty, crises and conflict, low level of infrastructural development, corruption and absence of any defined developmental direction. These features had made some politicians to conclude that Nigeria is a failed state merely characterised by crises, disunity, conflict and dependence (Ake, 1996). These problems have proved intractable because we have turned our back in studying their origin, causes and effects. Solution to a problem requires having indebt knowledge of the problem. This is not possible where the history of the subject is not known. The study of history cannot be divorced from the act of making or influencing history. As noted by Kapteijns ‘the real nature of history is to play a part in history itself’ (Ogbogbo, 2010). The question that agitates the mind from all these issues raised are; first why has the teaching and study of history not taken seriously in Nigeria’s schools? Second, what is the official orientation of the government in historical scholarship? Three, in what ways could history study contribute to sustainable national development? Fourth, to what extent has the practitioners of history helped to reposition the image of the discipline? Answers to these questions would form part of the discussions in this paper.

Golden Years of History Study 1948 – 1970s

History as a systematic study and interpretation of the past of human activities is as old as the existence of homosapiens. However, the fore-runners of the study of Nigeria and African history evolved at the university college Ibadan, later university of Ibadan. The scholars that were at the vanguard of promoting historical scholarship were led by K. O. Dike. Others include S. O. Biabaku, J. C. Anene, C. C. Ifemesia, J. F. Ade Ajayi and a host of other erudite scholars. Through workshops, seminars and conferences, they researched on Nigeria and African history. Their efforts culminated in the formation of Historical Society of Nigeria, a platform through which the study of history and its practice were promoted (Ogbogbo, 2010). The forum has continued to promote history advocacy and practice in Nigeria through its regular annual national conferences, publication of the journal of Historical Society of Nigeria and the Tarikh series. Thus, interest in the study of Nigeria and African history became a serious field of intellectual enquiry. The exploits recorded by the earliest Nigerian scholars mostly from university of Ibadan made Adeoye as reported by Ogbogbo (Daily Thrust Newspapers, 2016) to conclude that the first 25 years (1955-1980) of academic achievements in African History could be labelled as the golden age of historical scholarship in Africa. During these periods, the number of students that enrolled for various history
examinations blossomed. An example would suffice here, in 1966, History subject was among the most favoured subjects at the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examinations and students performed optimally. For instance, the principal pass in English was 244, Latin 3, Geography 269, mathematics 88 and French 19; History recorded 414 principal passes, next only to chemistry which had 601 principal passes. The political class then were quick to realize that history is very essential for governance, conflict resolutions, diplomacy and international relations, technological development, advancement of civilizations and human relations. The profession was highly prized and graduates of history were sort after by employers of labour. The earliest historians used the lessons of historical scholarship to solve societal needs. Leonardo Da vinci, highly regarded as a master genius started as a painter historian and later exhibited his knowledge of history in medicine and this skill earned him the status of the first anatomist (Adeyinka, 1983). In the same vein, the greatest orators and influential social mobilizes for the common good of the ancients were historians. Horatious and pericle, both of ancient Greece, were some of the best illustrations in this connection. Through their skilful and careful application of words and actions, they were able to mobilize their societies into battles of conquest, thus building some of the world’s greatest and prosperous empires of the ancient world. Ronald Reagan, former president of the United States of America used his oratory power and careful diplomacy to liquidate the former soviet union10. In Nigeria, historical knowledge and its application helped the Nationalists to overcome the harm done by colonialism and foster national feelings, self education and national integration. The discipline also sort for ways of developing the grassroots level of the society which constituted the greater part of the society. For the colonialists, this new approach (History) was a welcome development because it offered them the opportunity of knowing their subjects more intimately and thus paved way for their material exploitation. The elites equally found relevance in the study of history for providing a written testament of whom they really are and where they are coming from and perhaps, where they are heading to.

The Study of History Recedes
It is no longer a matter of conjecture that the number of schools and the number of students offering history especially, in public examinations such as the West African School Certificate and National Examination Council examinations have declined to an abysmal proportion. The intrinsic value of history had lost steam and appeal in official discourses and mindset. The importance of history as a branch of human knowledge and its functional role as a tool for sustainable development was put to question as the government, teachers, parents and students developed apathy in the study of history. This allusion could be supported by these examples; Adeyinka (1983) after a survey, reported a massive decline in the number of students offering history in Ondo, Oyo and Ogun States from 1961 – 1981 WASSE. In the same vein, Fadele12 using the WAEC analysis reported the downward trend of enrolment in history in Nigeria’s secondary schools from 1985-1988. He observed that in 1985, 118, 080 students registered for history, in 1986 and 1987, the number reduced to 105,926 and in 1988 the number went down further to 74,425. In Kano state, the number of schools offering history declined from over 800 secondary schools to 113 schools and the number of students offering the subject in these 113 schools had continued to reduce progressively. For instance, while in 2013, about 4,117 students registered for the subject, in 2014, it came down to 3,918 and in 2015 the number went down further to 949 (Hamisu, 2016). It is argued here that these declining figures in the number of students enrolling for history study are a reflection of the falling standard in Nigeria’s educational system. As pointed elsewhere by Nwaugo (2013). a
combination of historical processes were jointly responsible for this decline such as the National curriculum conference of 1969 and the subsequent introduction of the 6-3-3-4 educational system which provided social studies as an alternative to history. In the curriculum of secondary schools, history is an optional subject; students were to choose History, Government or Civil Education in WASCE and NECO. Most principals of secondary schools either out of ignorance or deliberate sabotage encourage their students to choose either Government or Civil Education. The cost for this mistake had been very colossal. Most citizens passed through the primary, upper basic and secondary education without knowledge of their past; who they are, where they are coming from and gyration into the unknown future. Thus, Nigeria has largely remained disunited, disoriented and disintegrated ever since they abandoned their history, as the saying goes, a people or country without history has no future. The study of History provides analytical insights into social formations, anthropological development, advancement of civilizations and social relations. The failure to encourage history advocacy and teaching in Nigeria’s schools had contributed to the failure to apply historical understanding to national issues. Nigerian and African historians, especially since 1970s have tended not to emphasize the practical needs of the discipline in terms of the promotion of documents on projects or research programmes relevant to knowledge. Production for both formal and informal education, development of primary public depositories, specialised research centres and archaeological projects have been decreasing rather than increasing. Similarly, the dearth of historical features in our public education programmes, in form of historical documentaries, drama, movies exhibitions, popular reader’s and essay competition cannot be disassociated from the dearth of historical consciousness among the population (Bello, 2010).

The downward slide in historical studies could equally be noticed in the funding of historical researches as well as the neglect of key historical institutions such as museums, archives, national memorials or the establishment of iconic national symbols, sites and other historical reference point and the total neglect of the benefits to be derived from historical resources that could have helped in the redefinition, reorganization, integration and development of Nigeria if colonial inheritances are to be structurally, culturally, historically and truly overcome (Nwaugo, 2013). On this note, one must commend the effort of the minister of education, Alhaji Adamu Adamu and the executive secretary National Education Research Development Council (NERDC), Professor Ismail Junaidu for taking the bold step of bringing back history study at the primary school and upper basic (Bello, 2010). The Historical Society of Nigeria should also be commended for their tireless pursuit of this goal.

Conclusion
This paper has explained the historical processes that led to the high esteem accorded to the study of Nigeria and African history from 1948 to the last decade of 1970s. During these years, History advocacy and the study of history in schools – primary, secondary, colleges of education and universities were quite high and commendable. However, from 1980s the subject witnessed a dramatic downward slide due in part to the outcome of the 1969 curriculum conference and subsequent conferences thereafter and the introduction of 6-3-3-4 educational system. It was discovered that the failure to include history in the curriculum of primary school, upper basic and the obscurantist and reductionist orientation in official discourses concerning the discipline is responsible for the decline of Historical scholarship, hence the poor enrolment of students to study history. The paper also took a swipe on the practitioners of the discipline and graduates of history that failed to apply the lessons from
historical studies to other fields of human knowledge such as medicine, ICT, Agriculture, environment, science and Technology. It was observed that the teaching and study of history in Nigeria’s schools has many more roles to play in sustainable national development.

**Recommendations**

Beyond the seeming negative impact of the 1969 curriculum conference and subsequent conferences and official orientation towards the subject, the practitioners of the discipline and the graduates of history should explore ways of applying the lessons of history to other fields of knowledge such information and communication technology, environment, medicine and technological advancement as Nigeria strives to achieve sustainable development.

The methodology of teaching the subject should be re-examined and re-structured to include new pedagogies. The lecture method, especially in the primary school and upper basic should be de-emphasised and prominence given to field trip, visual and audio-visual method, film, pictorial, painting and drama.

Emphasis should be on Nigeria’s history and cultures, especially at the primary and upper basic. Sustainable development in Nigeria would be a mirage if citizens do not study their past history and culture which defines their future. The new idea of the present Minister of Education in Nigeria, Alhaji Adamu Adamu to re-introduce history in the primary school and upper basic is a welcome development, but should be matched with action. It could be recalled, that the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo reached that understanding with the leadership of Historical Society of Nigeria but was never implemented.

Ministerial nominees in Nigeria should be made to answer some basic questions on Nigeria’s past historical experience: This is important in order to establish the connection between the past and the present decisions they are bound to take for the citizens. A minister, who doesn’t know where we are coming from, can hardly know where we are going and even how to get there. Finally, HSN should organise workshops, seminars and conferences for headmasters, principal of schools (private and public) government officials and other non-historians to sensitize them on the utilitarian value of the discipline and its contribution towards achieving sustainable national development.

**References**


Daily Thrust Newspapers, Thursday, May 19, 2016, P. 42

