

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING HISTORY CURRICULUM IN THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE) SCHOOLS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This write up considered the challenges of implementing educational policies, the relevance of history to national development and the pertinent role that could be played by the history teacher in the 21st century to help stem the tide or ensure successful implementation of education polices. Attention was also focused on the current predicament of history as a discipline which has made it loose its rightful place in the society. This article canvasses for proper implementation of UBE policies in order to re-position history for greater national development.

Introduction

The education sector in Nigeria is being besieged by myriads of problems ranging from inadequate finances, lack of qualified teaching personnel, poor commitment by government, lack of facilities in schools and many more, Ukeje (2000). These problems have continued to pose serious challenges on the path to achieving educational excellence in the 21st century. In order to curtail some of these problems, the Obasanjo administration initiated some reform measures in 2004, as highlighted in Kolo (2007). These measures were aimed at addressing and repositioning the education sector in the 21st century.

However, the major problem surrounding Nigerian education is that of faithful implementation to the letter. The concept of implementation here is not only perceived as government being the sole agent of implementation but that at the various stages, certain groups, organisations and individuals as well are equally vested with certain tasks to ensure the successful implementation of educational policies. It is in this perspective that this write-up intends to look at the contributions of history to national development, the current situation of history as a discipline, challenges and of the implementation of history curriculum.

The Current Situation of History as a Discipline in Nigeria

History as a discipline in the current dispensation is facing hazardous moments from the various sectors of the society. As a result, implementation of the history curriculum and policies often encounter lots of difficulties. It is in this regard that Bozimo (2001) noted with great concern that "the battle today is no longer to gain a place for history in our schools, but how to prevent it from being lost and to make it relevant and sustainable". What is more is the fact that the individual history

teacher has not been enabled by the existing educational process in Nigeria to develop his personality and his ability in relation to his discipline nor is he fully and comfortably integrated into his society in order to enable him play an effective role so as to help it develop. This is largely being considered by many, ignorant though, as irrelevant to the society which has necessitated some parents to even influence their wards against choosing the subject in their final exams.

Even where students sum up enough courage to study the subject, they are often being jeered at by the community and their peers. Thus, they sometimes regret it and look downcast for daring to choose the "forbidden" subject for anyone who wishes to make progress in later life. All these seemingly negative tunes associated to the discipline have their roots from the way and manner successive regimes in Nigeria handled the discipline. For instance, in 2006, during the national education summit in Abuja, while the Minister of Education was presenting the federal governments' blue print on educational reform, no mention was made about history. It took the curiosity of the then Gov. Abdullahi Adamu of Nasarawa State to remind the Minister of Education of the absence of history in her beautiful blue print. Though she said she was going to look into it, that was the last time anybody heard anything of the federal governments' attempt to give history a befitting status in the country's education sector reforms.

Moreso, the commitment by the Obasanjo regime to the History Society of Nigeria that history was going to be made compulsory and taught at all levels of primary and tertiary education has not seen the light of the day. Despite the fact that he asked the Historical Society of Nigeria (H.S.N) to produce a curriculum which was done and submitted, and the Minister's exclusion of history in her plan of educational reforms, goes a long way discerning the level of seriousness with which the discipline is taken. This is with regards to the fact that no nation develops without taking some reflections from its past.

History and National Development

This section will start with the inspirational statement of this great historian, Professor Ajayi in Oyeranmi (2002:2) who once commented

The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued with a sense of and perception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth. Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability and without them, the future is bleak.

This leads us to the unavoidable truth that history, which seems to be the jest of the ignorant and which suffers from government poor patronage in Nigeria is holding the key to national development in its arsenal. How?

Nigeria, a country endowed with vast material and human resources still remains underdeveloped largely attributed to the fact that the people lack national consciousness due to lack of history. This explains why its inhabitants are

languishing in abject poverty, corruption, aggressive with each other and poor education standards. There seems to be no future plan for the development and eventual survival of the country. All the people care about is what should be obtainable today and not tomorrow. Ironically, a nation that does not plan and implement policies for tomorrow will definitely not develop. In this regard, Oyeranmi (2002) averred that "they (Nigerian people) tend, indeed, to act or react based on the present situation and care little about the past. It is therefore not surprising that few care about the kind of future to be built for both the people and the nation". Is it any wonder then that the politics of personal interest has now become the order of the day? Is it any wonder then that laboratories in schools are without equipments? Libraries without books? Merit has been thrown to the winds and stared at by the helpless masses. Historical consciousness instill in a people, the zeal to commit themselves and make sacrifices towards nation building.

Again, it is only history of all the disciplines in the world that makes a nation or people turn back at their past, analyse what it was, pick some lessons or bits and pieces and then try to synthesize them to make a better tomorrow. On this same idea, Fafunwa (1990) stated that history is to a people what memory is to the individual. A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without the guide post of precedence to share their course. For instance, history contributed towards Japanese development which eventually becomes one of the most developed countries of the world today. It is the second most powerful economy after the USA. The devastating effects of World War II made her look back at her ruins and consciously went back to work in her classrooms, laboratories with bitter memories of the past while being driven by the nationalistic urge to overcome it and succeed. It is some of these reminiscences when taken seriously, that contributes to nation building. However, in Nigeria, the situation is different.

Furthermore, it is only history that could genuinely reconstruct Nigeria's past by shaking off all its colonial structures like law, economy, social structure and the like and replace it with structures aimed at addressing the needs of the Nigerian state. This is one way in which its inhabitants would be imbued with an enduring sense of history which will in turn instill in them, long lasting national consciousness leading to nation building in Nigeria. National consciousness, will lead to collective responsibility thereby eradicating the nation of the menace of ethnicity, regionalism, religious bigotry which constitutes bottlenecks to nation building. History thus strives to unite the people towards nation building as also subscribed to by Fanon (1983) when he said

The greatest task before us is to understand at each moment what is happening in our own country. We ought not to cultivate the exceptional or seek for a hero, who is another form of a leader. We ought to uplift the people; we must develop their brains; fill them with ideas; change them into human being".

Challenges in the Implementation of History Curriculum Reforms

The challenges to the implementation of the history curriculum in the supposed enlightened age are so worrisome that one cannot but praise the efforts of professional history teachers. Some of these challenges include:

Quality of Teaching: - This has continued to persist especially at the secondary school where people who read social studies or government are employed to teach history. It does not only stop at that, people who teach history at whatever level lack the basic skills, principles and methods of constant delivery to the learners. As a result, curriculum content is not properly imparted and well covered before examinations are taken. History being a unique discipline also has a unique way of teaching it. Thus, those who found themselves in it by chance without undergoing the process of learning how to teach it will definitely not be able to teach it well. This therefore brings us to the question of low quality of teaching leading to poor performance in examinations. Hence, there are inadequate teachers to implement the excellent curriculum policies, Ukeje (2000). In other words, history teachers in some sections are educators and not educationists. An educationist is an expert in the principles and practice of education while an educator is anybody who teaches even without the professional qualification. History curriculum implementation is suffering from this intractable illness.

Moreso, the attitude of the Nigerian government is further constituting the nuisance factor towards successful history curriculum implementation. The Obasanjo regime at the twilight of its tenure mandated the Historical Society of Nigeria to modify the history curriculum to include democracy and good governance for immediate implementation in schools (senior and junior). This was not to be so as nothing has been heard about it till date. Even the educational reform conference organised by the Obasanjo government in 2006, Kolo (2007) noted did not find it worthy enough to address the incessant travails of the history curriculum. The current administration is talking about reforming the reforms, they still have a long way.

Forging Ahead

- Education authorities and governments should not bastardize the art of teaching history by opening the doors of history teaching to mere educators who are not educationists. This is to enhance quality teaching and proper implementation of history curriculum.
- Government should endeavour to own up to its commitment of ensuring history curriculum reform implementation by providing the required logistics to the relevant bodies for its effective implementation.

Conclusion

Every nation that is worth its salt needs history for national growth and thus, conscientizes its citizens on the pertinence of history to its national life. The case in Nigeria has become worrisome over the years due to the increasing difficulties faced by this noble discipline, especially in terms of its curriculum implementation. It is hoped that this write up will bring to the fore, the need for all

concerned to ensure its proper implementation in all sectors of the Nigerian education system.

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