

CONSTRAINTS OF TEACHING HISTORY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE: IKA NORTH EAST AND IKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS AS CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

This article presents a study which is aimed at identifying the problems and constraints of teaching history in post primary schools in Nigeria. The problem of teaching history is often traced to the low production capacity of the history teacher. This article argues that the dullness of history lessons in class and lack of interest among the students can also be traced to the teacher who is accused of lack of resourcefulness, laziness, intellectual bankruptcy and lack of interest in the subject. Finally, it is argued that the introduction of non - professional historians as history teachers also constitutes a major problem in teaching history. It is against this background that this study has become necessary in order to make useful suggestions aimed at arresting the constraints. The article submits that the solution to these problems lies in the co-operation of the teachers, students and the government.

Key Words: Constraints, effective, history, teaching, schools.

Teaching is a complex activity and this is why it is often discussed in Conferences, Workshops and Seminars. No teaching method is adjudged the best as each method has its own strengths and weaknesses. However, there are many ideas and techniques of teaching history in recent times. These have replaced the traditional method where the teacher that knows the subject matter comes into the class armed with his facts and fires on as an orator or a public entertainer until the end of the lesson. The students' not given the opportunity to contribute in the teaching-learning process become passive learners and gain little or nothing at the end of the lesson. Some of them may even sleep off in the process. Now the teaching of history has progressed. Chaffer and Taylor (1977) pointed out that teaching needs to take account of the pupil and the teacher as well as the subject. But this is not always the case with some history teachers. Some are teacher-centred and so they make history lessons dull and uninteresting and this results in boredom among the students.

This in turn results in the gradual decline in the popularity of history among other school subjects. Today prospective history students complain when they are told to choose history as a course of study. This study has become very necessary because the subject is almost going into extinction in our secondary schools. The objective of this article therefore is to find out the constraints militating against effective teaching of history in secondary schools in Delta State using Ika North East and Ika South Local Government Areas as case studies. The question now is what are the problems militating against the effective teaching of history in Secondary Schools in Nigeria.

Constraints of Teaching History

One of the constraints of teaching history in post Primary Schools in Delta State today is lack of interest in the subject by some history teachers. There are many teachers who lack interest in the teaching profession and such teachers who may be referred to as birds of passage in the profession, pay more attention to or devote more time to other things which will give them quicker gains than the profession. Such teachers take the profession as a hobby and therefore are not committed to it. Just like the adage which says that 'a lamb takes after its mother', such teachers who lack interest in teaching history can only succeed in killing the interest of prospective students in the subject. Crookall (1976) argued that

as a member of that profession, the history teacher should have at his fingertips the skills and understanding necessary for the good teaching of his subject ...he should be something of an historian with a genuine professional interest in the study of history as well as in the teaching of it. Without such a professional interest in history itself no teacher will have that personal interest and enthusiasm which are vital to real success.

It is only a history teacher who has kept his interest in his subject alive that can stimulate the interest of his students for children like and pay attention to what interests them, whereas they discard and soon forget what does not interest them. (Crookall, 1976)

Closely related to this problem is lack of resourcefulness on the part of some history teachers. There are many history teachers who though possess the relevant paper qualifications but are ineffective in teaching the subject. They prefer to teach other subjects because they lack the initiative to know what to do to make the subject interesting and exciting. An example is the writer's experience as a teacher in Pilgrim Baptist Grammar School, Issele Uku where he introduced and taught history between 2002 and 2005. When the writer left the school in 2005, though there was a history graduate in the school he could not teach the subject because he preferred teaching Government. A resourceful teacher should possess ideas needed to provide solution to an identified problem. But because some of these teachers lack resourcefulness they do not use necessary aids such as Maps, Charts, Models, Pictures, Photographs, Radio,

Television, Tape Recorders and Players, Films etc. Because these aids are not used the subject becomes dull and the students see it as an abstract subject and develop bad taste for learning it. Some history lessons cannot be effectively taught without the use of necessary teaching aids.

Another problem confronting the teaching of history in some Secondary Schools in Delta state is that sometimes non-professional historians are given the subject to teach. These teachers who lack the historians craft and techniques bastardize and make a mess of the subject. By so doing they kill the interest of the prospective history students. A non-professional historian will not know as Dickinson, Lee and Rogers (1984) pointed out that history deals largely with matters that are essentially contested and to look for unanimity among historical accounts is simply to misunderstand the nature of historical knowledge. He will therefore not be objective in handling historical facts. For a teacher to impart the right knowledge, he/she must have acquired the right knowledge through training. The acquisition of this knowledge makes him/her competent to impart the right knowledge to his students. A teacher who has not acquired the requisite training may not find it easy teaching what he has not learnt. Such a teacher will go to the class with lack of self-confidence which results in failure.

There is also the constraint of shortage of enough trained history teachers. Due to discouragement given to the subject by the government and the public only very few persons are willing to choose history as a course of study in institutions of higher learning. Only recently a girl was offered admission in one of the higher institutions to study history. The girl was not willing to accept the offer but decided to seek the advice of her illiterate mother. Her mother said she will not pay fees for somebody going to school to read history. When the writer tried to discuss with the woman, the reason she gave for discouraging her daughter was that everybody said history is not a good course for anyone to study. Now, who told this illiterate woman that history is not a good course of study? There is this public distaste for the study of history even among the educated elites who are ignorant of the contributions of history to the development of a nation. The problem of shortage of enough history teachers is compounded because as the writer argued in another paper, some teachers who read history in the Universities and Colleges of education sometimes prefer to teach subjects outside their discipline Onwuka (2007). They feel comfortable teaching Government, Christian Religious Studies, Social Studies, English Language or Literature while their subject is facing the threat of extinction. Some go further by changing their course even after obtaining a Nigeria Certificate of Education (N.C.E.) or a Bachelor's Degree in history.

Closely related to this is that Government does not encourage the teaching of history in schools. There are many schools in the state without history teachers while there are some history graduates roaming the streets in search of jobs. There is emphasis

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on the sciences but the nation can not do without the arts subjects like history. The table below shows the proportion of History teachers compared with the total number of teachers in selected secondary schools in Ika North East and Ika South Local Government Areas of Delta State.

Name of School	Total No. of Teachers	No. of History Teachers
Marymount College B.B. Owa	89	02
Owanta Sec. Sch Owanta	92	03
Ika Grammar Sch. B.B.Owa	75	01
Ede Grammar Sch. Umunede	30	01
Owa Alero Sec Comm. Sch Owa Alero	61	01
Mixed Sec Sch Abavo	48	Nil
Gbenoba Grammar Sch. Agbor	60	01
Ogbemudein M/S/S Agbor	96	02
Ime Obi S/S Agbor	44	01
St. Charles College Abavo	34	Nil

Source: Post Primary Education Board Asaba.

The worst part of it all is that even some of these schools that have History teachers do not offer it.

Another problem confronting the teaching of history is the choice of method. If history lessons are dull and not interesting, it is most likely that the method of teaching it, is responsible. One method that is not suitable for students in secondary schools is the lecture method. This method makes the students inactive and passive. The teacher using this method can only sustain the students' interest for a very short time. Soon the students become tired and many of them fall asleep. Any method of teaching history that does not call for the active participation or contribution from the students reduces history to lifeless information.

How to Overcome these Constraints

In order to overcome some of these problems militating against the effective teaching of history in secondary schools in Delta state, certain things must be put in place. This of course needs the co-operation of the teacher, students, government and the public. The teacher should arouse the interest of his students in history lessons. For maximum result in every lesson the teacher must arouse the interest of his students, otherwise the lessons are wasted. One way of arousing students' interest is through the provision of teaching aids. When teaching aids are properly used by the teacher, it will help to arouse the interest and curiosity of the students as well as make history lessons enjoyable. Teaching aids could be visual like diagrams, charts, maps, books, sketches,

pictures, posters and models. They could also be audio, like tape recorders and radio or audio-visual, like films and television.

Teaching aids help students to learn faster and easier. Kinder (1959) pointed out that a variety of teaching materials used in proper balance produces best learning results. Teaching aids will help to bridge the communication gap between the teachers and their students and help to reduce the amount of talking by the teacher. In fact Awoniyi (1975) commented on the usefulness of audio-visual aids as follows:-

Indeed experience has proved that these educational hard wares cannot only simplify many aspects of study, but can quicken the interest and widen the experience of the pupils. Ever since, innumerable research findings have shown that audio-visual materials contribute to pupils understanding, habits, skills, motivation and interest.

A history teacher will do well to himself and his students when he avoids any topic he cannot make interesting enough for the students to understand.

Another role the history teacher has to play in overcoming the problem of teaching the subject is in organizing excursion to places of historic importance. Fadeiye (2004) defined excursion as an educational trip, visit or journey to places of interest which are capable of promoting the level of understanding of the pupils, students or people taking part in the excursion. Excursion could be made to places like the shrine, palaces of Kings or notable chiefs, the village stream like the one at Umuaja, Museum, or even to a local blacksmith or carpenter's workshop.

Excursions in history will give the teacher and his students the opportunity to see in practical terms those things they have read in books or discussed in class. It will also help to clear the doubts in the minds of students and make history real to them. A visit to Ile-Ife for example will afford the students the privilege of seeing the staff of Oranmiyan, at Nana Living Museum in Koko the students can see the photograph of Nana being taken to exile, or even Nana's grave. A visit to the National War Museum in Umuahia will expose the students to the technology of the defunct Biafra Republic and the bad effects of war on any nation. Personal visit to these places of historic importance will help to further stimulate the interest and curiosity of the students and they will be prepared to learn history the more. Besides excursion will enable the students to develop a critical mind. It will afford the students the opportunity to examine critically the authenticity of the historical information they have heard and read in books.

Moreover history lessons should be constantly evaluated. This is very important because it helps the teacher to determine the extent to which teaching and learning objectives have been achieved. It will help the teacher to know how far the students have

understood what they were taught and to identify the areas that need more emphasis. Another role of evaluation in history is that it assists the teacher to assess the different methods of teaching he has been using and know the one that will best suit his students.

The provision of in-service training for the history teachers will also help to arrest the problem affecting the teaching of history in Nigerian Secondary Schools. History teachers should be encouraged and given the opportunity to attend Seminars, Lectures, Conferences and Workshops organized by the Historical Society of Nigeria and other professional bodies where they can update their teaching techniques. This will give them the necessary tools to improve their professional competence. According to Obebe (1982):

adequate preparation is necessary ... if we do not equip the teachers with adequate tools for their jobs, we shall be loading them with yesterday's tools to do today's job. And if we do that they will be out of job tomorrow.

Except history teachers are properly equipped through training and re-training the accusation that they are lazy, intellectually bankrupt, immoral and not committed to the teaching profession will never end.

Again, the history teacher should always be careful to choose a teaching method that is capable of arresting the attention of the students' method like note giving and lecture method should be avoided if possible in the secondary schools. The history teacher should explore the project, method, discussion method, individual assignment method and the excursion method. The most suitable method for students in secondary schools is any method that is student-centred which emphasizes the importance of student participation. For learning is effective and meaningful when the learner is actively engaged in the process and understanding the ideas or skills that he is learning. (Afe 1996)

It is important to add that apart from the method chosen by the teacher, he should be friendly to his students for this will encourage the students to participate actively in the Lesson. Nwaokolo and Akilaiya (1996) stated that an effective teacher talks less in the classroom by involving the pupils in the discussion.

The attitude of the public towards the study of history should change. Though this is not the forum to discuss the innumerable contribution of history to national development, suffice to say that nations that do not know their history can hardly make progress.

Above all the government should employ more history teachers and encourage the teachers by improving on their condition of service. The long awaited Teacher's Salary Structure should be approved and implemented to the letter. The present posture

in which government is insensitive to the plight of teachers is condemnable. It is sad to note that even the 27.5% increase in the salary of teachers approved by the government in 2008 to take effect in January 2009 has not been fully implemented and teachers are always warning up for strike.

Conclusion

The author has attempted to enumerate some of the constraints confronting the effective teaching of history in secondary schools in Delta state using the two Ika Local Government Areas as case studies. He identified problems such as lack of resourcefulness, assignment of history courses to non professional historians, shortage of trained history teachers, adoption of bad teaching methods by the teachers and public distaste for the subject. He suggested that students' interests should be aroused by the history teacher using teaching aids.

There is also the need for the governments and governmental organizations and individuals to contribute their quota in financing education in this country. Where there is finance audio-visual aids can easily be provided in our schools. However, the teacher should not depend solely on the government for the provision of these aids. History teachers should be resourceful enough to improvise simple teaching aid materials within their reach. The practice where student-teachers when sent out by Universities and Colleges of education produce teaching aids while on teaching practice only to abandon them when they are employed to teach should stop.

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