

***Patriotism and the Teaching/Learning of History in Nigeria's Basic Education
Schools: An Assessment of NCCE Minimum Standards***

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Abstract

Patriotism and civic responsibilities of the average Nigerian has been a major subject of discourse in contemporary study of citizenship and apathy to the Nigerian nationhood. Nigerians lack of patriotism has been largely blamed on the functionality of government which has been described as selfish and self-centered. This study however, not oblivious of the above factor looked at another dimension which may have hampered the spirit of patriotism in Nigerians. Most nations whose citizens to a large extent are said to be patriotic have in addition to good governance, the consciousness of patriotism from childhood as this is explicitly contained in the syllabi of elementary schools up to the Colleges. This work therefore critically assessed the knowledge and information being given to students of Nigeria's Colleges of Education in terms of the syllabus which could endear them to be patriotic and have the nationalistic pride. By so doing, this research looked at the general perception of the Nigerian citizens towards their country, the philosophy of Colleges of Education in Nigeria and assesses the syllabus of History as contained in the National Commission of Colleges of Education Minimum Standards which is the official guiding document for the training of students of Nigeria's Colleges of Education to determine if they are sufficient to raise the consciousness of patriotism in the Nigerian student.

Keywords: Patriotism, Teaching, History, Minimum Standards, Education, Nigeria, Colleges,

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Introduction

The word 'patriotism' has often been used interchangeably with 'nationalism' and hardly can one distinguish patriotism from nationalism. In any case, both discuss the affection and emotion of a citizen towards his country. Patriotism does not just occur, it is a gradual process that is developed over time. This could be spurred by what you hear, what you see, the ideology imbibed over time, the attitude of the government towards you and the rest. However, a citizen tends to develop this spirit of patriotism by the ideas he is being fed with from childhood before he even starts comprehending the idiosyncrasies of life. It is not just a coincidence that adherents of religious faiths try to instill the tenets of their religions on their children from childhood. By so doing, the growing child unconsciously develops the love for that religion. The major agents with which to instill this spirit of patriotism on citizens are through the curriculum of schools which will expose them to the greatness of the people and land. The mass media is also an important agent of such education. The government's value and regards for the citizens also influences a citizen's patriotic feelings.

In Nigeria however, patriotism is alien to the national consciousness due largely to government's neglect for the citizenry. Government's value and regards for the people in terms of security, provision of welfare and boosting of national pride goes a long way in influencing the spirit of patriotism on the citizens. Nigerians see the political leadership as selfish, corrupt and inept. Though, the governmental activities in boosting patriotism or otherwise is not the subject of this paper but how a school curriculum shapes the feeling of patriotism using the discipline of history.

All over the world, the subject of 'history' has been an agent of revolutionary ideals. It has a methodology of boosting and raising the consciousness of a citizen towards his country thereby influencing his level of patriotism. However, it is rather unfortunate that this powerful agent of imbibing the spirit of patriotism on citizens is not taught in the basic schools in Nigeria. Thus, children whose ages range from year four to year thirteen may likely not know the greatness of their past. Most secondary schools in Nigeria have also replaced this all important discipline with 'government' and 'civic studies'. It is then a possibility to go through the length of academics in Nigeria without being exposed to the history of Nigeria. This paper thus critiques the curriculum of history in the Nigerian Colleges of Education as contained in the National Commission of Colleges of Education Minimum Standard to see if the content can spur patriotic feelings on the citizens.

Methodology

This research applies both the thematic and analytical method of historical reconstruction. It uses the oral history where personal interviews and informal chats were conducted. The research also made use of secondary sources such as journals, published and unpublished books, periodicals and other relevant literature.

Patriotism

The word 'Patriotism' is an ambiguous word which is very difficult to define because of the relativity of the term. This is because, in the broad sense, anything you do out of

'love' for a country is patriotism even if such action is evil. Patriotism is defined as a sense of national loyalty, a love of national symbols, and specific beliefs about a country's superiority.¹ Scholars despite their various views and their perception of patriotism came to a consensus that, patriotism is a deeply felt affective attachment to a nation.² According to Robert Jensen, patriotism includes love of a nation's land, people, culture, leadership, national policies and institutions.³

Many scholars have dealt with the problem of a valid theoretical and empirical distinction between *nationalism* and *patriotism* and with its consequences for research. Adorno et al. in their work, *The Authoritarian Personality* distinguished between *genuine patriotism* which stands for 'love of country' and *pseudo-patriotism* which measures '[...] blind attachment to certain national cultural values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and the rejection of other nations as out-groups'.⁴ According to Habermas' normative concept of constitutional patriotism and Staub's constructive patriotism, patriotism is based more on universal humanistic values than on identification with history or culture. According to them, democracy, republican values, and human rights are also inherent to the concept of patriotism. One can deduce from their works that their conceptualization of patriotism is based mainly on shared values and on a rational set of norms.⁵

Nigerians and their level of patriotism

The average Nigerian does not know or comprehend what it is like to be patriotic. This is evident in the way national issues are discussed and how national monuments are treated. The popular statement made by John F. Kennedy, the former president of the United States of America that "*think not of what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country*" is practically alien to the Nigerian populace. This is because, Nigerians over the years have had this bottled feelings of anger towards the leadership of their country which accounts most for the non-challant attitude of Nigerians towards Nigeria. According to Usman Abubakar, a farmer in North-Central Nigeria, affection for Nigeria cannot be in his heart because love is reciprocal and as such, he cannot love a country that does not care about him, his family or his business.⁶

Dr. Micheal Udoma believes Nigerians are not patriotic because the country has never spurred the feelings of patriotism in Nigerians. He further explains that Nigeria does not stand up for Nigerians when they are in need or faces danger, whereas, countries like the United States of America can go to war over her citizen and can also go to any length to rescue their citizens in distress. According to him, it is just natural for citizens of such country to be patriotic towards her country unlike Nigeria whose leadership practically does not know if her citizens exists.⁷ In a paper presented at a conference, Mr. Anaza Abaukaka summarized the frustration of Nigerians thus ".....they wake up tired not knowing what the day holds, without jobs, they wander aimlessly, those with jobs are not well remunerated with lots of requests from jobless relatives, no water, no electricity supply, bad roads, unequipped hospitals, in short, majority of Nigerians live in hopelessness. And in contrast, the elected few whose responsibility is to govern the nation to the benefit of all lives in stupendous affluence and brazen display of wealth."⁸

Whereas, the citizens of the United States, Britain and even Ghana in West Africa relish with pride, the history and culture of their nations with utmost show of love and respect for constitutional authorities, Nigerians exhibits the care-free attitude to their country's development. Just like the leaders whose lack of patriotism for the country led them to corruptly enrich themselves with reckless impunity and other unpatriotic behaviour, the followers are also guilty of being selfish and not having the interest of the country at heart.⁹ It is indeed a general consensus that Nigerians, both the ruling class and the followers are not patriotic and that accounts to the almost failed state status Nigeria is battling with. This development can largely be ascribed to bad leadership and governance over time and its failure to instill the concept of patriotism on the growing citizens from childhood in the form of education curriculum that will endear the citizens to their country which will be discussed later in this paper.

History and Mandate of the Colleges of Education in Nigeria.

Nigerian Colleges of Education are the 'train the 'trainers' colleges established to train and equip teachers for their esteemed functions. There are twenty one federal owned Colleges of Education in Nigeria, while thirty one Colleges of Education are owned by various states of the federation. The graduates of these institutions are assigned to teach in the nation's basic schools, helping to nurture and shape the kids who are 'the future leaders of tomorrow'. The mandate of the Colleges of Education includes:

1. to provide full time courses in teaching instruction and training in technical, vocational, sciences and arts;
2. to conduct courses in education for qualified teachers;
3. to arrange conferences, seminars, and workshops relating to the field of learning; and
4. to perform other such functions as in the opinion of the College Council may serve to promote the objectives of the college.¹⁰

The Nigerian Colleges of Education awards a National Certificate of Education (NCE) after students successfully completes a three year course of study in any chosen discipline.

National Commission of Colleges of Education Minimum Standards on History; An Assessment

The National Commission of Colleges of Education was established by decree 13 of 17th January 1989 (Amended Act 12 of 1993) now an Act of the parliament, as a completion of tripod of excellence in the supervision of higher education in the Country.¹¹ The establishment of the commission was a resultant effect of the utmost importance accorded to quality teacher education by the federal government of Nigeria. Since inception, the Commission has continuously pursued goals of quality assurance in teacher education. The pride of the Commission is based on the National Policy on Education which states

that “no education can rise above the quality of its teachers....”¹² For over two decades, the Commission had ensured that teacher education contributed immeasurably into national development. In pursuit of its objectives, the Commission had standardized and continuously reviewed the curriculum of the Colleges of Education. This constant review has strengthened the capacity of the Nigerian Certificate of education.

However, out of the seven objectives outlined in the teaching and learning of history in Nigeria’s Colleges of Education, only two of the objectives are likely to shape a student’s perception on the desired love and feelings of patriotism.¹³ These objectives are;

- i. to encourage in the students the growth of an awareness of his responsibilities and opportunities as a Nigerian citizen; and
- ii. to enable students to develop an appreciation and understanding of the historical developments in Nigeria and the contribution of her past heroes and heroines.

These objectives however have not been properly harnessed to achieve its desired goals as seen in the course contents. Students in the first year of study take eight courses which are *Historiography*, *Major world civilizations*, *West Africa up till 1800*, *Nigeria up till 1800*, *Egypt and the Nile Valley*, *North Africa up to 1800*, *East and Central Africa up to 1800* and *Economic History of Nigeria from the earliest times to 1800*.¹⁴ In *Historiography*, students are taught the nature, justification and sources of history. They are also exposed to various perceptions and views of history and its relationship with other disciplines. The content of *Major World Civilizations* include the study of the Egyptians, Greeks, the Romans, the Chinese and the Latin American civilizations and their contributions to historical development. *West Africa up to 1800* exposes students to the empires of the forest and savannah kingdoms and the trans-Saharan / trans-Atlantic trade. *Nigeria up to 1800* looks at the evolution of early culture in societies and states to the emergence of the centralized states. It briefly looked at the contributions of NOK, Benin, Igbo-Ukwu and Ife civilizations.

In the course *Egypt and the Nile valley*, students are exposed to Egypt and its series of invasions and the influence of meroetic civilization on Western Sudan. *North Africa up to 1800* looks at a brief survey of the land and people of North Africa, the Berbers, the Carthaginian empire, the Romans, Arabs and Turkish rule and European imperialism. *East and Central Africa up to 1800* looks at the general survey of the land and people of East Africa. *Economic History of Nigeria from Earliest times to 1800* generally looked at major units and institutions of production and distribution. It looks at salt making, iron works, carving, leather works etc. It also exposes students to trade linkages and inter group relations.

Having looked at the course contents of history as being learnt by history students of Nigeria’s Colleges of education in their first year, it is observed that out of the eight courses taken, only two discusses Nigerian History. It is expected that a nation who strives to impart nationalistic feelings to her citizens should dwell more on Nigerian History. For example, in the course, *Major World Civilizations*, one see no reason why the Nok Terra-Cotta, the Igbo-Ukwu bronze, the Ife and Benin civilizations do not feature prominently in that segment when these civilizations are part of the major world civilizations. The course should stress the contributions of the NOK, Igbo-Uwu, Ife and Benin civilization to world civilizations. One will also see that despite that it features in a

different course, *Nigeria up to 1800*, it was mentioned in a passing. Without prejudice to having a broad knowledge of the world history, Nigerian History should take a pride of place in the teaching and learning of history in Nigeria especially at this level of education to inculcate in the students the spirit of patriotism.

The history students in the second year takes eight courses also which include *Methodology*, *Research Methods*, *Themes in World History, 1750 – 1919*, *European Conquest and African Resistance*, *Southern Africa up to 1800*, *Nigeria in the 19th century*, *Economic History of Nigeria since 1800*, and *Introduction to Archeology*.¹⁵ *Themes in World History* exposes students to the Atlantic slave trade, the industrial revolution, French revolution, the Napoleonic Europe up to 1816, Russia, America's war of independence, the first world war and other themes. The course *European Conquest and African Resistance* examines the background to imperialism and Africa's resistance and the factors that led to Africa's failure to resist occupation. The course, *South Africa up till 1800* looks at the Hottentots, the Bushmen and the Bantu. It also exposes students to the Portuguese invasion and colonialism. The course *Nigeria in the 19th Century* exposes students to the Sokoto jihad and the establishment of the Caliphate. It further looked at the 19th century Yoruba land, Benin, the South-Eastern states and missionary activities in that area.

Meanwhile, the course *Economic History of Nigeria since 1800* exposes students to the trend in economic development by 1800, patterns of Nigeria economic development during the colonial era and after independence. In the course, *Introduction to Archeology*, the students are exposed to definitions and scope of archeology, significance of archeology and techniques in archeological techniques. It also discusses the origin of man.

Critically assessing the courses taken by students of history in Nigeria's Colleges of Education in their second year, only three out of nine courses, focused on Nigerian history. Studying the Economic History of Nigeria since 1800 without heralding the contributions of the cocoa plantations to beverage production in the world, cotton in the manufacturing of textile materials and the groundnut cultivation and other cash crops that led to industrial revolution in Europe is a brazen betrayal of an opportunity to harness the economic prowess of the nation as this knowledge will have instilled on students the great potentials in their land. It will also give Nigerian students hope that if the land had enjoyed such economic boom in Agriculture, the present generation could do more.

The year three students spends half of the year in student attachment to schools known as Teaching Practice and uses the remaining half to learn five history courses which include, *Nigeria in the 20th century*, *The Third World*, *Africa in the 20th Century*, *Southern Africa since 1800*, and *World History-1919 to the Present*.¹⁶ The students are exposed to colonialism, independence, military rule, civil war, unity, neo-colonialism in the course *Nigeria in the 20th century*. In the course, *The Third World*, students are taught the concept of 'third world', developing and developed countries and their relationship with European and North-American countries. In *Africa in the 20th Century*, students are exposed to decolonization process in Africa, Nation building, military rule, external relations etc. In the course, *South Africa since 1800*, students are further taught the

Mfecane and its impact on European occupation and policies, the great trek, Southern African Nationalism, Apartheid, the liberation movements etc.

In the courses offered in the third year, out of five courses, only one focused on Nigerian History. While Nationalism of South Africans is studied, Nigeria's nationalism was overlooked. How can one love what he knows not? Patriotism heavily relies on the food of history to nurture and that's why most developed nations shaped the curricula of history to instill the citizens with innate love and respect for their nation.

Having seen the course description for year one to year three students of history in Colleges of Education in Nigeria, one begins to wonder if objectives (i) and (iv) as encapsulated in the National Commission of Colleges of Education Minimum Standards on History have been met. These items are of importance to the theme of this paper 'patriotism'. For the avoidance of doubts, the objectives are

- i. to encourage in the students the growth of an awareness of his responsibilities and opportunities as a Nigerian citizen and*
- ii. to enable students to develop an appreciation and understanding of the historical developments in Nigeria and the contribution of her past heroes and heroines.*

Nigerian curriculum on history as reviewed above does not ginger such spirit or fire of patriotism in the Nigerian students; it is heavily laden with histories and activities of other nations. Nigerian history curricula should harness the greatness of the country in the comity of nations; project the contributions of national figures prior to the coming of Europeans who wielded enough power and respect, national figures during the colonial and post-colonial era; Nigerian professionals doing great at home and in the diaspora in their various professions like Professor Emegwali, Chimamanda Adichie, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and their contributions towards the progress of their various fields should feature prominently in the present day curriculum. Nigerian heritage sites should also be projected; students of history and indeed students generally will naturally imbibe the spirit of patriotism having recanted the greatness of his country. The teaching of history can make or mar the destiny of nations and the greatest problem of Nigerians is the ignorance of her history as stated by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former president of Nigeria.

In previous curriculum of history, African students took pride in relishing the greatness of the Mali, Songhai, Kanem-Borno and Oyo empires because they were taught these heroic strides of their leaders and lands. Mansa Musa was said to have devalued the worth of gold when he travelled to Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage apparently signifying the level of wealth of the Mali Empire. In contrast, the present day students do not even know their heroes and their activities, thus the passion to strive for the love of country is not there.

Conclusion

Patriotism is an innate feeling of love and emotional attachment to one's nation which can be achieved through conscious and deliberate knowledge of the greatness of a person's land and people amongst other means. It is however observed that the main agent of spreading this all important abstract phenomenon is education. The paper having

assessed the contents of the curriculum for the Nigerian Colleges of Education discovered the inadequacies of the contents to spur the fire of patriotism in Nigerians. The failure to offer 'History' as a discipline in Nigeria's basic schools and the lukewarm attitude it is being handled as a discipline in Nigeria's senior secondary schools has denied Nigerians one of the best medium to spread and imbibe the spirit of patriotism. Nevertheless, the nation could as part of periodic review of the curriculum include topics and themes in the teaching of Nigerian History and indeed general studies in Nigerian schools from Basic Education to Universities. If history and history topics are accorded same preference as that entrepreneurship, computer and civic education which have been made compulsory subjects in Nigerian schools, the urge and feeling of patriotism will spring up in the hearts of Nigerians thereby making her a greater nation.

Endnotes

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Oral Interviews

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Interview with Mrs. Angela Ogedemgbe, 48 years, Trader, Lokoja, February 24, 2015
Interview with Yahaya Umar, 32 years, Unemployed youth, Lokoja, February 23, 2015
Interview with Peter Achimugu, 26 years, Unemployed youth, Lokoja, February 23, 2015
Interview with Maria Salami, 22 years, Student, Okene, March 12, 2015

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