



## Implementing History Education as Strategic National Framework for Strengthening Intergroup Relations

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### Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine the increasing socio-political, cultural and economic problems that have militated against the progress of African continent, and demonstrate the extent to which the re invigoration of history in school curriculum can strengthen development practice in the continent. Africa generally has been plagued by several social problems ranging from insecurity, ethnic-religious conflicts, post-election violence and a number of other socially motivated crises. Thus from the western African region to the south, Central Africa; East and North, the evidence of conflicts have been reported. The conflicts arising from clash of group interests, and particularly, among contending forces and several belligerent groups have unarguably, been the bane of economic and political development. To most critics, the arguments have continued to hinge of the relegation of history subjects in schools-high schools and tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics, among others. The multiplier effect of this is the huge gap that has been created between the past and contemporary age where a vast majority of the people are unarguably isolated from the mainstream culture of unity and common African cultural heritage. Again, with the rising wave of globalization and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the orientation of the average African child is more or less greatly influenced by western culture and exposure. What we now experience in most African societies (Nigeria inclusive), is a system where people are hardly conscious of the Pan-African spirit of brotherhood which finds expression in collective interest as well as love and care. The consequence of this development is fast staring the continent in the face, while the sub-region constantly gravitate with numerous challenges raging from lack of community bonds, conflicts, violence, terrorism, kidnapping(as in the case of Nigeria);child trafficking, banditry, proliferation of small arms and light weapons; drug peddling ,among others. This paper is an exploration of some of the strategies that can be employed in order to mitigate social problems that have continued to fester among groups and sections of the African society using history subject as a point of departure. The study is essentially an archival work, and hence, relies on existing works of experts for its investigation. The method of data collection is therefore secondary in nature. The paper recommends that to effectively contain the challenges confronting the continent, there is the urgent need to reinforce the teaching and learning of historical narratives having to do with African culture and principles, especially among teenage population in African schools. This way, the much sought-after nation-building, peace, stability and viable inter group relations would be realized.

**Keywords:** History; Education; Strategy; Inter group; Relations; Development

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## Introduction

The main thrust of this study is to examine the relationship between history education and the effect of the discipline of historical pedagogy may assert in mitigating social conflagrations and conflicts. The work pays particular attention to the role of history education as deliberate policy framework and the extent to which the subject matter could foster inter group relations in Africa in general and Nigeria, in particular.

Ndijuye and Tandika (2020) in their studies on the role of education in peace-building in Africa's Great Lakes Region, alluded that Africa, and indeed sub-Saharan Africa is notorious for conflicts due to its volatile nature as well as the complex nature of inter group relations. In Africa, and especially after the period of colonization, it does appear that there has been the general problem of social group integration, economic management challenges and the apparent relapse into anarchy. As a result of this development, almost all nation states in Africa namely, West, East, Central and North Africa have one way or the other experience socio-political turmoil. Ndijuye et al; (2020) maintain that there has been widespread political upheaval in many countries within the region, including the celebrated ethnic tension in Rwanda and Burundi between the Hutus and Tutsis; the Mwembechai conflict in 1998 and the Pemfa crisis of 2001.

There have also been intense conflicts in Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Central African Republic, Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, among others. In all of these conflicts, the enormity of human casualties and deaths as well as material losses are, to say the least, quantifiable.

Available empirical evidence of the impacts of conflicts among ethnic groups in Africa reveals that the crisis has continued to gain momentum. The implication of the crisis situation has more or less not only resulted to frosty social relations and mutual co-existence among the people, but also impacted negatively on the economic development and well-being of the people. There is a further evidence to the fact that African countries who have been managed by civil unrest and wars have experienced low economic progress. Particular mention has been made of countries such as Burundi where US\$116 have been supposedly lost, coupled with increasing depletion of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to around 50%. Again, the nation's currency was reported to have depreciated to around 386%, while the population of the country living below



poverty threshold increased to about 67% (Panama Press, 2004). The United Nations Development (UNDP) (2012) went further to inform that in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and due to the devastating impacts of political crisis and inter group conflicts, well over 70% of the citizens live in abject poverty. Again, nearly 2/3 of the people (most of youthful age brackets) are either unemployed or poor. On the issue of humanitarian crisis, it has been widely reported that hundreds of thousands of African children, women and other vulnerable groups have become destitute homeless and in fact, even abused due to conditions of social unrest among contending social groups.

In the case of Nigeria, many social conglomerates and sub-nationalities exists. From the classic works of Uriah Amadi and Esther (2020), the Nigerian state is home to about 300 minority ethnic groups. This is aside from the major ethnic sects comprising Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. The Hausa/Fulani nationality occupies most of the nation's northern geopolitical zone. On the other hand, the Igbos and Yorubas inhabits South-East and South-Western geopolitical zones, respectively. According to Abraham (2017), other minorities within the nation's ethnic equation include the Tivs, Annang, Ijaws, Itsekiris, Ibibios, Efik, Ogojas, Obudu, Bekwarra, Utugwang, Gakem, among others. It should be noted here that the politics of colonization and subsequent amalgamation of the hitherto separate territories by the colonialists has further brought about the contestable social group contradictions the nation has continued to grapple with this moment.

This state of affairs therefore raises fundamental questions of the desirability of what history education can do to mitigate inter group conflicts thereby fostering national economic development, social cohesion and integration. For instance, critical questions such as: of what relevance is history education in strengthening intergroup relations in Nigeria? To what extent can history education resolve Nigeria's social development challenge? And, what are the inhibiting factors that have militated against the incorporation of history education as deliberate and ambitious policy strategies aimed at resolving conflicts among inter group relations in Nigeria?

To be able to answer these questions, the study rests on the following set of objectives viz:



- i. To examine the relevance of history educations in a bid to strengthen inter group relations in Nigeria.
- ii. To ascertain the extent to which history education can strengthen inter group relations in Nigeria, and,
- iii. To investigate the inhibiting factors that continue to mitigate against history education as deliberate policy strategy designed to resolve inter group conflicts in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The method employed for data collection for this study is exploratory in nature. It involves the use of existing literature and works of experts in the broader field of historical and intergroup relation studies. Essentially, the study relies on existing archival research material sources ranging from academic journals, books, government documents, among others. The effective use and adoption of these material sources have become crucial so as to enrich the study investigation as well as answer very critical questions bothering on the role of history pedagogy and the extent to which this can enhance peaceful co-existence among Nigeria's multiculturally diverse ethnic complexities. According to IPL (n.d) exploratory study is useful due to its flexible nature while carrying out a research study. Besides, this method is important because it assists in examining new related concepts, and therefore, may be used for future research.

### **Literature Review**

#### **History Education**

Several attempts have been made by scholars and experts to describe and explain what history of education stands for. According to Richard (2019) history as an academic discipline forms the basic foundation for social enlightenment. This is due to the fact that history recaps past events, reinforces present social circumstances and then, speaks and mould future events as well direct the affairs of society in general. What this means is that the future owes its potency and survival to the rightful application and knowledge of historical facts. This point of view as put forward by Richard (2019) has however, been criticized. The reason for the critique is because knowledge, in the present global system is evolving. Moreover, the economic expansion as it presently been



experienced in developed economies is the direct result of scientific innovations and not direct product of historical collections.

Consequently, it can also be argued that though improvement in technology and information are driving forces of societal development in a global world, research evidence proves that historical events have continued to shape all human actions/inaction, human reactions as well as interactions in every human relationship with either social or physical environments.

On his part, Daniels (1966) looks at history on the condition of human experience. To Robert, the absence of history means that it would have been pretty difficult for nations of the world to make appreciable advancements in every area of life, be it economic, social, political or cultural. Adeyinka (1986) agree with Damids (1966) when he asserts that the effective evaluation, analysis and study of historical pasts give room for present developmental strides, which in turn, snowballs into future hopes. On the other hand, history education refers to the application of pedagogy of history in terms of teaching, research and learning using clearly defined study curriculum. This involves ambitious policy framework designed to inculcate knowledge expertise and transmit same from one generation to another.

### **Inter group Relations**

The concept of inter group relations have been viewed differently by historical experts and intelligentsia, though depending on the ideological leanings of each of the proponents. From the point of view of Uwomano (2017) cited in Akinwumi, Erunke and Ameh (2019), inter group relations dates back into history, and up to the period before colonization. According to Afigbo (1987) inter group relations is synonymous with the cultural values of the people woven into a common homogeneous beliefs, social relations, fraternity, cooperation and fraternity. To Afigbo (1987) all African pre-colonial societies have been literally guided by this value system, and the nature of traditional cultural ties that existed at a point is tied around this singular gesture.

However, in view of the changing pattern and nature of inter group relations propelled by propelled by alterations in ideal contents, patterns and forms of social interactions, the argument has tended to shift from the status quo to the new normal. The latter speaks to the changing



dynamics of social existence where persons or groups may see themselves as distinct entity, which is why there might be conflict of interest, agitation and different ideological affinities. In Africa, this sense of social differentiation has been the bane of national unity, integration and development. The multiplier effect of this is the dramatic rise in socio-political crisis, civil war, mutual suspicion and insecurity (as in the case of Nigeria), among others.

### **Role of History Education in Strengthening Inter group Relations in Africa: Perspectives from Nigeria**

Africa is a continent made up of heterogeneous, but uniquely connected culture. Of the 53 independent countries in Africa (except for few islands that may still have been under annexation by other major countries within the continent), there are well established cultural mores between and among the people. According to Ndille (2020) opine that African people are literally cast in the mould of colonization and imperialist conquest, which is why some of the indigenous pre-colonial characteristics have waned out. These characteristics include traditional moral education, piety, social etiquette and code of moral values and conducts. All of these have subsisted and African societies have greatly been shaped and influenced by these moral features until the incursion of modernization and neo-colonization. Thus, as an aftermath of historical evolution, the African continent and its people were readily mandated and supposedly compelled by the changing circumstance to accept the new world order – the modern education and westernization as well as its value systems. This development, undoubtedly, brought to the fore several foreign educational curriculum as templates for human capital development acquisition of knowledge assumed a more or less uni-linear posturing in design and practice.

Buttressing the position held by Ndille (2020) about the evolution of African traditional education system, Obozuwa (1980) had earlier averred that before colonial conquest of African Natives, there existed a well-coordinated African system of education and widely practiced among the respective Native Kingdom. Such ancient kingdoms include the Kingdom of Benin, the old Oyo Empire, the Itsekiri, Efiik, Nembe, Kalaberi, among others, in Nigeria. In Ghana, for example, the Kingdoms that existed before colonization include the Akwamu, Denkyira and Ashanti. In all of these, research evidence proves that parents were actively engaged in teaching



children good morals and character molding. In Nigeria, the two most dominant religions – Islam and Christianity helped propagate religious cultural injunctions, attitudes and behavior based purely on their distinct convictions and faith.

In a nutshell, it can be said that education in many precolonial African societies took the form of apprenticeship as well as informal pattern. Children were in turn expected to learn moral etiquette from their respective households and transmit same trait to the wider society. The continuous propagation of traditional education, no doubt, constitutes one of the building blocks for the sustenance of peace and stability. This is unarguably one peculiar reason Africa has remained peaceful in the past. However, all that have changed due to the influx of alien cultural values and moral principles. It does appear that the only respite would be the extent to which education can further be strengthened to reflect the prevailing realities of the African people where peace-building reinforces itself in the quality of educational practice in the continent. In view of the foregoing narratives, it becomes pertinent to ponder awhile on the indispensability of history education in the sustenance of peace and tranquility among social groups in society. This poses a rather important issue in discussions bordering on the political landscape of the Nigerian state.

Again, Richard (2019) has pointed out that Nigeria currently witnesses a very protracted epidemic occasioned by the complex nature of its ethnic group sentiments. There seems to exist a very frosty relationship between sections and ethnic groupings in the Nigerian state. The friction, to many public analysts, gave rise to the over thirty months civil war in 1967 where hundreds of thousands of her citizens were killed in the process. Besides this war, several contests have been fought and won by a number of social forces emerging in form of armed groups. They include, but not limited to, the likes of Niger-Delta militias, the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), the Odua People's Congress (OPC); Boko Haram Islamic sects, and of late, the armed bandits. The latter operates in most parts of Nigeria's North-East and North-West geopolitical zone of the country. The carnage as well as the enormity of destruction of lives and property caused by these groups are imagined. The raging debates that have continued to persist is the fact that most youths who have become heavily indoctrinated into terrorism and other dangerous social sects



may have lost touch with historical realities which before now, emphasized basically on loyalty, chastity and respect for social order in society.

To a number of classical scholars such as Ciaro, pine that the inability of persons or groups who do not know or remember what history has handed down to succeeding generation, such persons may be doomed! This point has been re-echoed by contemporary historical experts such as Fafunwa (1990) and Ajayi (1990). According to Fafunwa (1990) history education is a panacea for the achievement of sustainable intergroup relations. Accordingly, Fafunwa (1990) warned that when people live in relative ignorance with no knowledge of their past, such people or society might likely be groping in the dark without any clue for the future. Similarly, Ajayi (1990) corroborating the point of view of Fafunwa (1990) argue that there is a significant relationship between history, the extent of historical interactions and the corporate existence and development of a nation-state. To Ajayi (1990) went ahead to stress that every independent nation-state is directly or indirectly, a product of historical circumstances as well as events. This means that no nation can hardly escape from its historical antecedent. The import of this argument is that to be able to strike a balance between national existences of any political entity, there is need to understand its group memories, define it nationality and identity.

In the case of Nigeria, some of these wise counsels do not apply in our national psyche and social existence, especially among the various social cum ethnic cleavages. According to Adedeji (1999), the Nigerian state has hardly utilized historical values, which is probably informs the deafening spate of violence, lawlessness, mutual suspicion, anarchy, religious sentiments, ethnic conflicts, etc. Undoubtedly, the Nigerian state is inherently diverse, with widespread culture and traditional values. As earlier stated, outside the major tribes such as Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, the nation houses several micro-ethnic sub-nationalities. Research evidence shows that in spite of the seemingly distinct nationalities, there exists mutual interaction in form of pattern of education, trade and exchange as well as common bonds.

The unfortunate situation however, is the inability of the Nigerian leadership at the top political echelon to harness and tap into our common historical bonds to promote peaceful co-existence and national unity. History education, no doubt, assists in nation-building, enhances and





promotes in-group potentials as well as helps in leadership recruitment based on character, potentials and track records. It has been widely reported that as a result of long period of neglect of history education by the leadership of the Nigerian state (military or civilian administrations alike), the nation has courted for herself several myriads of conflicts and insecurity currently being experienced in the nation. To this end, Omolewa (1986) cautioned that training a person in science without corresponding training of the state of the psychological disposition could be detrimental to not only the individual involved, but the ripple effects may take dangerous toll on society itself.

For the benefit of hindsight, the Nigerian federal government had in the recent past incorporated history education in the curricular as part of the continuous efforts to foster national peace and unity. Among other things, the curricular states that there is need to acquire adequate historical knowledge from the past and bring same to bear on the relationship between the state and citizens. Again, the federal government of Nigeria, through the West African Examination Council (WAEC) noted that history education equips the mind with requisite intellectual capacity and skills for interpretation of history, appreciate factors that may stimulate national unity, cooperation, as well as relate events in the Nigerian state with other African state with similar events occurring globally.

For most liberal scholars such as Eller (1999) his education serves as potential raw material for the construction of ethnicity. This is evident in a case where politicians have, overtime used history to defend national unity and nationalism in diverse ways. Not only that, history education has the potential to clearly define relations between the society and state and help set the border line between citizens (in terms of rights and obligations) and the state. Though official gazettes and historical documentations, individuals know and understand their civic rights, obligations and responsibility. This in turn facilitates the spirit of patriotism and cooperation. Above, all the subject matter of history education enables a nation to the promotion of social reconstruction during or after conflicts. The internationalization of history education also guides peoples thoughts, attitudes and re-invigorates people's original sense of fraternity and brotherhood devoid of prejudice, segregation and social group stereotypes.



### **Factors Militating against History Education and Effective Inter group Relations**

The aforementioned analysis has clearly given insights into the relevance and indispensability of history education and the extent to which inter group relations may be initiated and realized. However, it can be said that a number of mitigating factors have continued to impede this noble objective. Some of the factors believed to have militated against history education and effective social relations among sections of the Nigerian society include, but not limited to the following:

First, there is the challenge of cultural mix between each of the components of the Nigerian social system. The mix finds expression in the complexities that have existed long before colonization. They include the major ethnic tribes as well as the minority groups, each of which have varying degrees of cultural affinities and value system. It therefore becomes difficult to domesticate a general role as common social practice for all of these sub-nationalities to imbibe and internalize. It therefore goes without saying that due to the differences in cultural practices, Nigerian can hardly accept what is obtainable in other climes that are largely not in consonance with specific culture. From the works of Epitime (2019) argue that unlike the case of Nigeria, the Cameroonians in contemporary times have downplayed important culture values and practices, each of which has become a bane for national integration and development. According to Peshkin (1967) Akpan (1990), Ajor and Odey (2018) agree that in absence of well-defined and acceptable national history education in Cameroon, very insignificant milestone has been achieved in terms of inter group relations.

Secondly, history education has faced huge challenge of ethnic loyalties. The question of ethnicity and ethnic nationalism is prevalent and common place phenomena in Nigeria politics. The difficulty about ethnic sentiments and loyalty in the extent to which different cultural groups see their common ancestry and history and superior to others. When this happens, the paraphernalia of government which specifies national curriculum for public schools can be tinkered with, depending on the ethnic group which forms majority in the parliament. In Nigeria, there has been cases where history as an academic discipline was once excised and removed from the curriculum. It took a lot of agitations and counter-agitations for the subject to be inculcated back into the academic syllabus, especially for high schools.



Ndille (2020) has maintained that ethnic loyalty such as this has been the major driver that propelled most African conflicts in some countries within the continent. Ndille (2020) went further to cite instances from the unfortunate Nigerian civil war of the late 1960s, the post-election skirmishes that occurred in Kenya; the carnage and ethnic blood-bath that took place in the Central African Republic, Liberia, Rwanda and Burundi, among others. In all of these frictions, there has been continuous mutual suspicion and high level of intolerance among the people. Although, recent evidence proves that in spite of increasing animosity in Africa, the government of Rwanda has made ambitious steps to restore confidence and harmonious working relationship between and among various ethnic sects in the East African State. This is demonstrated by the intense drive by the government to reposition educational curriculum, enhanced national integration and re-define developmental goals and achievements within the Rwanda polity.

Moreover, on the reason why history education has failed to achieve integration, and promote adequate inter group relations, the World Bank (2005) has alluded that ever since Africa was integrated into the global capitalist system, there has been a steady rise in the erosion of African history and cultures. These claims are hinged on the introduction of neo-liberal policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and several other new world orders. Again, the global system of neo-liberalism comes with new inspirations and orientation in terms of social and international economic policies and frameworks. Thus, the emerging global trend such as this is a supposedly a veritable tool for extinction of history education and the role of education a agent of change and cooperation becomes stifled. Consequently, it should be emphasized that the core of neo-liberalism speaks so much to the importance of human capital development, innovation and the new knowledge economy as its cardinal point of departure. To this end, a number of academic curriculum have been allegedly revised in favour of global concerns much to the detriment of national inter group relations in terms of curriculum design and development. According to Cameroon (1998), the new order places premium on citizenship re-orientation to the demands of global economic politics and the policies, entrepreneurship, creativity; issues of human rights and gender questions. All of these are unarguably opposed to national cultures, opinions and matters relating to geographic and linguistic peculiarities (Cameroon, 1998).



Asides neo-liberal factors to the achievement of integration and inter group relations, there are other impeding factors. These include lack of priority to history education by the federal and state governments infiltration of politics into the nation's educational curriculum and lack of encouragement to pupils to develop interest in history education as a subject. There are also issues of armed conflicts, terrorism, banditry and ethnic conflicts that may not allow room for pupils enrolment in schools. In Nigeria's north east region, for example, the Boko Haram conflicts that erupted since 2009 has incapacitated pupils enrolment in public schools to date.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined the nexus between history education and the extent to which the subject matter of history can mitigate conflagrations between and among social groups. The study identify specific social sects in African society existing in a whole web of interactions and as social inter groups. These groups, from the findings are common in the African context, and appears to have unique features in form of ethnic identify, fraternity and tribemanship. One common denominator that defines Africa and her people is the bond that tend to define not only the economy and social relations of the people, but essentially characterize the African politics up to the central governmental system and structures. What this study has done is to stress the overarching importance of history education as an instrument for cohesion and peaceful co-existence bearing in mind that a people with common history and/ancestry should naturally consider themselves in that light, and hence, exist in relative peace and tranquility as social groups.

In this work, references have been made to a number of African countries such as Rwanda, where though, inter group conflicts and wars had permeated their social ranks in the past. This nation, from its recent historical experience, has embarked on a rather ambitious educational projects and development using history education to not only grow its national economy, but basically preach peaceful co-existence among warring parties in conflict. The paper raises fundamental questions of relevance of history education to inter group relations and the extent to which this variable can be exploited to engender a befitting inter group relations, using Nigeria as a point of departure. A number of literature have been reviewed including history education



and inter group relations, the purpose of which is to identify a gap that has been left undone by previous scholars and experts.

From the findings made in the course of this investigation, it has been observed that a number of factors have constituted themselves into a huge albatross on the path to effective realization of the core objectives and intents of inter group relations using history education. These factors, among other things, include, prevailing cultural mix between and among various ethnic cleavages making up the African/Nigerian social systems. The findings also show that the ethnic loyalty question as exemplified by the African Natives to their immediate ethnic divide; the integration of African cultural values into the global capitalist system as well as the usurpation of African historical values by neo-liberal philosophies, among others. All of these factors, to this study, can be said to be inextricably linked, and hence, presents significant contradictions that have continued to oil the wheels of inter group conflicts across the African geo-politics to date.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the aforementioned findings, this work proposes the following recommendations as follows:

First, there is need to propagate the concept of ethnic mix and diversity as important agent and means for peaceful co-existence among African people. Cultural mix should not be seen as instrument of separation by virtue of differences in majority or minority group mix.

Secondly, African/Nigerian citizens should be made to realize the need to pay allegiance and loyalty to the state rather to ethnic bigots. There should be a legislation in peace, with clearly defined boundaries to this effect.

Thirdly, while we may want to argue that the world system is a global community, it should also be known that African historical realities should not be sacrificed at the altar of neo-liberalism and globalization. There is therefore the need to demarcate culture of history of the people from internationalism based on country or continent – specific assessments. This way, African history can be preserved. African governments should also set the right priorities for the preservation of African history, regulate conflicts, encourage pupil's enrolment in schools and generally improve



history curricular. All of these will no doubt, engender adequate space for the propagation of history education with all its attendant philosophies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.



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