ATTITUDE OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARDS HISTORY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF THE SUBJECT

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Abstract

This paper sought to discuss the attitude of senior secondary school students towards history, and its implication for effective teaching and learning of the subject. The reason is because of poor performance of students and low enrolment in the subject by senior secondary school students. The paper identified crucial issues in history that have affected the interest of students in learning the subject or have made students to have negative attitude towards history as a subject. These issues include poor teaching methods, the voluminous nature of the content of the history curriculum, wrong perceptions of the subject by some people, lack of interest in the teaching of the subject by some teachers, negative role of some school counsellors, negative role of the government and discrepancies in historians' accounts. Therefore, for history to regain its lost glory so that students can patronize the subject and learn it with passion, the study recommended that the history curriculum be restructured to take care of contemporary issues; government should improve the welfare of teachers so that they can put in their best,

parents-teachers forum should be formed to discuss students 'performances in history, historical societies should be formed in our schools to make the teaching and learning of history more practical and interesting through the provision of history rooms which should be established in schools and be well equipped. These will hopefully help in addressing the problem of students ' negative attitude towards history.

KEY WORDS: Attitude, Implication, Teaching, Learning, Performance and History.

INTRODUCTION

Attitude is a mental and neutral state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting dynamic influence upon individual responses to all objects and situations with which it is related (Bature, 2005). No one is born with his or her attitude but it is developed and learned. It determines students readiness or reluctance to embrace any new ideas and this facilitates or hinders desire to learn or acquire new ideas and techniques. However, history is the study of the past activities of men in the society and how these activities help in shaping the present for a better future (Amos, 2010). History exposes students to ethical values and morals of the society; it teaches students the bad and good aspects of life and trains the minds of students towards societal goals. It encourages students to take up enterprises and also instills in them good leadership qualities. With these promising objectives, it needs to be taught and learned with great passion. However, students have developed negative attitudes towards the subject and this has affected their performance and enrolment in the subject in senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

The issue of students attitude towards history is of great importance to the teaching and learning of the subject as a brilliant performance in history must have to be born out of a good and positive attitude, which plays an important role among school subjects. Sanda and Maigoro (2007) said that history was one of the subjects that were studied with much determination and passion but today things have
changed for the worse. This made the anothers to look at the subject as a one in crisis. The teaching and learning process of history is in a state that

requires urgent attention if better performance is to be expected.

CONCEPTUALISING ATTITUDE

Attitude means perception towards a particular thing or object which could be positive or negative. Bature (2005) sees attitude as a mental and neutral state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting direct or dynamic influence upon individual response to all objects and situations with which it is related. He went further to say that one is not born with his attitude; the learning process plays an important role in the development of attitude. Attitude involves problems of perception and motivation; as a result of attitude, a person may be more likely to perceive certain objects than others. Some attitudes affect perception after their arousal even though they may not have oriented the person originally into the direction of the perceived objects. Students' attitude towards history in senior secondary schools is believed to affect students' performance in the subject either negatively or positively. Attitude determines students' readiness or reluctance to embrace any new idea and these facilitates or hinders desire to learn or acquire new ideas and techniques. Obe (1992) says that "interest motivates learning". Students who are interested in a subject tend to study it happily, frequently and more effectively. He further said that identification of students' interest will help to promote self-understanding and make teaching and learning more realistic.

Nwaokolo (1995) supported this idea by saying that students will work most diligently and most effectively at tasks in which they are genuinely interested Students developed negative attitudes towards history because of the way some of the history teachers teach the subject and even the wrong perception some people have concerning the subject. Some history teachers lack the indepth knowledge of the subject and lack methodology that is required to impart the historical skills and values that is required; that is why students are running away from the subject at the senior secondary school level of education.

REASONS FOR STUDENTS NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS HISTORY

The reasons why students have negative attitude towards history are numerous. Bature (2005) stated that among reasons why students have negative attitudes

towards history which has affected the enrolment and performance of students in the subject are traceable to the poor quality of teaching, which could be attributed to teachers' incompetency, low ability and development of negative attitude towards the subject and the teaching itself.

Any effective teaching and learning process depends much on teachers' personality, enthusiasm, qualification, knowledge of the subject matter, understanding of students' tactics and individual differences, empathy, ability to sense intuitively the procedure which will bring about the attainment of desired objectives. A good number of teachers teach because they have no alternative and are in the teaching profession until a better job comes their way. Most of the time, they are worried because of their financial position and that pushes them to be so engaged on part-time activities to supplement their income, thereby making the teaching of history to suffer setbacks. Bature (2005) asserted that parents influence their wards ' attitudes and performance in history in three different ways:

1. Parental expectation of the child.
2. The home environment.
3. Parents' quest for wealth.

Sanda and Maigoro (2007) attributed some of the reasons for students' negative attitude towards history to include the broad nature of history content which is wider than government and so students normally opt for government which has smaller course content that can be covered within a short time. This is so because students do not want to suffer themselves reading bulky materials; they prefer subjects that have smaller content that can be easily crammed. This has made students to prefer Government and Civic Education to History.

The attitude of government which is always in favour of science with a ratio of 60:40 has also attributed to students' choice of science over history. Scholarship admission and other key things are always in favour of science and have made

students to prefer science over history.

Sanda and Maigoro (2007) went further to attribute some of these reasons to the poor teaching methods employed by some history teachers which have ended up making the subject abstract and uninteresting. Some history teachers prefer to use lecture method in teaching history which will enable them cover as much as possible, the curriculum content than using role play or group discussion. The lecture method makes students to remain passive listeners and hence make the lesson uninteresting. However, role play, group discussion and other student centered methods make students to actively participate in the learning process.

The inability of history teachers to explain the basic concept of the subject very well with illustrations and vivid instructional materials has further made the subject dull and uninteresting thereby sending students away from the subject (Sanda, 2007). Some history teachers teach without using relevant instructional materials and even some do not know when and how to use these instructional materials in a lesson for students to comprehend well. As a result of that, the lesson becomes dull and uninteresting.

Other reasons for students' negative attitude towards history include the use of unqualified teachers with deficient methodology to teach the subject and with their poor knowledge of the subject matter. This has contributed immensely to students' negative attitude towards history.

The negative attitude of some guidance counselors who are responsible for guiding students in the choice of their career has also succeeded in recommending science subjects and social science subjects instead of arts subjects, especially history, for students (Sanda, 2007). This has made some of the students to drop some of the subjects, especially history, not because they do not like it, but because of the influence of the guidance counselors in their schools.

Most people in the society that have little knowledge of history misunderstand the subject and consider it to be dead and irrelevant. This has also made many students of history to drop the subject (Sanda & Maigoro, 2007). These students now believe that the study of the subject will not offer them anything good in

life. To them, there is no future in history as such no student wants to offer it; instead, they prefer the sciences and social sciences that have something positive to offer in life. Another wrong perception concerning history is that people look at it as storytelling, full of lies and of no use to man. This wrong perception discourages a lot of students who are interested in the subject hence they opt for other subjects like government, social studies and civic education.

Many history graduates have also contributed to students' negative attitude towards history. They project a pathetic and an uncompromising picture of those who studied history. These graduates have been stranded after graduation, without any job to show for the four years of university education. This projection has made students in the field and those who intended to study the subject to develop a negative attitude towards the subject.

Sanda and Maigoro (2007) asserted that school authorities have also played a major role in making students to develop negative attitudes towards history. Some schools do not offer history and even the few schools that offer the subject are normally discouraged by the school authority who always suggest for students to opt for subjects like civic education and government instead of history. The few ones that prefer to continue with history, the school authority normally frustrates them by refusing to provide relevant text for the study of the subject in the library for students to use. Relevant teaching materials that will help in facilitating the learning of the subject are not also purchased by the school authority.

Sanda (2007) observed that the assessment method in history is more demanding than in some art and social science subjects. In history, students are required to write extensively in their attempt to answer essay questions; points must be identified before explanation which is done in paragraphs. There must be introduction and conclusion and not only that, but also logicality and accuracy presented. Because of that, students view the subject as one that is highly demanding and prefer to offer government and civic education which demand only little explanation and normally in a point form.

Poor publicity by history teachers, Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) as well as stakeholders in the field have also contributed to the negative attitude of students in history (Sanda, 2007). Some of the historians are ashamed to

state categorically that they are historians and even students who are studying history are also ashamed to associate themselves with the subject. This negative attitude has affected the enrolment and performance of students negatively.

The Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN) that is saddled with the responsibility of organising enlightening campaigns in order to draw more students to the field, has not done enough to salvage the situation (Sanda, 2007). The society is just there by name but has failed woefully in motivating students to enroll and learn the subject better. This has made students hate the subject and hence they perform poorly.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF HISTORY

Obe (1992) wrote that "interest motivates learning". Students who are interested in a subject tend to study it happily, frequently and more effectively. He went further to say that identification of students interest will help to promote self-understanding and make educational and vocational choice more realistic. This is supported by Nwaokolo (1995) who says that students will work most diligently and most effectively at tasks in which they are genuinely interested. Therefore, students' attitude towards history is believed to affect students' performance in the subject either negatively or positively.

The implication is that history teachers should improve on their teaching methods. They should vary their teaching methods so that history teaching will not be uninteresting and boring for students. The teaching methods should be students centered to allow room for students' participation and make students active in the learning process. By so doing, it will make the teaching and learning of history very interesting.

The history teacher should do his best to improve on the learning environment so that it will be learner friendly. He can do that by being friendly. sincere and building confidence in the learners to believe in and rely on him. He should not make students to be afraid of him because that will make students to hate the subject.

Bature (2005) further stated that among the factors responsible for the negative attitude of students towards history at the senior secondary school level are factors traceable to the poor teaching methods used by some history teachers, which could further be attributed to teachers' incompetency. Any effective teaching and learning process depends much on the teachers personality, enthusiasm, qualification, knowledge of the subject matter, understanding students' tactics and individual differences, empathy and ability to sense intuitively the procedure which will bring about the attainment of desired objectives. However, this is not the case in history as the subject is poorly taught and some teachers have little knowledge of the subject as well as little understanding of children's individual differences. This has seriously affected the enrollment of students in the subject and even their performance in both internal and external examinations.

Sanda (2007) observed that the assessment method in history is more demanding than in some humanities and social science subjects. Therefore, students run away from history and opt for subjects like government and civic education that are less demanding. Therefore, history teachers should simplify assessment method in the subject to encourage and motivate learning the subject.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF HISTORY

For history to regain its lost glory, the following recommendations are made:

1. The content of history curriculum should be narrowed to meet up with the challenges of the contemporary world.
2. History rooms or laboratories should be established by government in all educational institutions, especially in institutions where history is taught. They should serve as venues for production and preservation of artifacts, models and other relics so that after graduation students can set up their businesses based on the knowledge acquired during the training.

3. Teachers of history should make their lessons real, practical and interesting so as to motivate students to learn the subject with passion.
4. Teachers of history should use good teaching methods that can stimulate the interest of students in learning the subject.
5. Government should improve the general conditions of service for teachers by providing them with the required incentives and generally improving on teachers' welfare so that they can put in their best.
6. Historical Societies should be formed in schools where they do not exist to make history more practical and interesting for students to learn.
7. Government should give appointments to only those that have educational qualifications or those that went through education training and are equipped with the required methodology of teaching history for better pedagogy.
8. .Parents should also be involved in developing their children's attitude positively towards history through the provision of incentives such as school fees, textbooks and writing materials to their wards and regular supervision of their children both at home and at school.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study identified that students have negative attitudes towards history as a result of the voluminous nature of the history content, government negative attitude towards the subject, the negative role of some history teachers, negative attitude of school authority towards the subject, and also guidance counselors. Also the issue of government placing science and social science subjects above history contributed to students' negative attitude towards the subject. As a result of that, history teachers should improve on their methods of teaching to make the subject more interesting. The learning environment should be improved upon so that it will be made learner friendly. By so doing, it will help in correcting the negative attitude students have towards the subject.

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