

Revitalizing Geography Education for Political Stability and Enhanced Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper focuses on revitalizing geography education for political stability and enhanced security in Nigeria. In order to achieve this objective, the concept of geography education, evolution of geography in Nigeria, revitalizing geography education and need for geography education was highlighted. The paper also highlighted the concept of political stability and security in Nigeria and the contributions of geography to political stability and security. It was concluded that revitalizing geography education will put it in a better perspective and make the subject more relevant to the present realities and thus prove that geography is not just a "nice to have" subject for an already crowded curriculum but it is also a tool for sustainable national development, political stability and security in Nigeria. Amongst others, it was recommended that the use of field trips be made compulsory at all levels of our educational system and government should equally ensure adequate supply of instructional materials in all institutions of learning offering geography as a subject.

Keywords: Revitalization, Geography Education, Political Stability and Enhanced Security.

Introduction

Now, more than ever before, geography education matters in Nigeria. Changing political boundaries, territorial conflicts, sustainability, political instability, insecurity and globalization are many examples of geographic issues that confront us in Nigeria and the world over on daily basis. They illustrate the power and importance of teaching and learning of geography. According to National Geographic Society (NGS, 2011) geography is the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments. Geographers explore both the physical properties of earth's surface and the human societies spread across it. They also examine how human culture interacts with the natural environment and the way that location and places can have impact on people. Geography seeks to understand where things are found, why they are there and how they develop and change over time.

Geography teaching in Nigeria during the colonial era was nothing to write home about. It was confined in the classroom. Learners learnt and learned big names of phenomena that were unknown in faraway lands (Adewale, 2016). Similarly, Majasan and Mansaray cited in Adewale (2016) reiterated that it was an era of geography teaching and learning described as "capes and bays" geography of Europe and its allies were taught and learners were only exposed to pockets of information and happenings around the world.

However, the curriculum of geography was totally changed immediately after independence as emphasis was shifted from the “capex and bays” geography of Europe to three main areas of local geography, map work and field work. This became prominent in the Nigerian school curriculum and was taught in schools. Specifically, geography curriculum in Nigeria comprises physical geography, regional geography, human geography and map reading and more recently the inclusion of Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS).

Clarification of Terms

- a. **Revitalization:** Is the action of imbuing something with new life and vitality or to restore something to life or give it a new life.
- b. **Geography Education:** Geography studies the relationship between man and his environment.
- c. **Political Stability:** Political stability is the ability of people’s government to share, access, or competes for power through nonviolent political processes and to enjoy the collective benefits and services of the state.
- d. **Security:** Security is the existence of conditions within which individuals in a society can go about their normal daily activities without any form of threat to lives and property.

The Concept of Geography Education

Geography is coined from two Greek words “geo”, meaning the earth and “graph”, meaning to describe. So simply put geography can be defined as the description of the earth. Iwena (2012) defined geography as the study of people, their activities, places and physical things within the earth. Similarly, Pius (2010) sees geography as the study of man and how he explores his physical, social and economic environment for his benefit. According to National Geographic Society (NGS, 2011) geography is the study of places and the relationship between people and their environments. Geographers explore both the physical properties of earth’s surface and the human societies spread across it. They also examine how human culture interacts with the natural environment and the way those locations and places can have impact on people. Geography seeks to understand where things are found, why they are there, and how they develop and change over time. Geography is also seen as the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments (NGS, 2011). The foregoing definitions simply highlight the simple truth that geography is a study which is solely centered on man and how he interacts with the environment.

Evolution of Geography Education in Nigeria

The beginning of Geography education in Nigeria started in 1948 with a single Department in the University of Ibadan, from then, until 1958 all staff of this department were

expatriates' from Britain. It is thus not surprising that the British tradition in geography formed the foundation of much of the training of geographers in the country (Mabogunde, 2004). The British tradition emphasized four main aspects of the subject namely; human geography, physical geography, regional geography and cartography and surveying. These were all areas taught within the frame work of what was then referred to as a "General Bachelors Degree" whether in the Faculty of Arts or Science. This meant that geography was taught as one of the three subjects of equal weight over a two year period after the intermediate Bachelors Degree.

However, in 1958 Departments of Geography began to emerge in Universities in other parts of the country, notably University of Nigeria (UNN) Nsukka and a few years later University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria and the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo Universty) (OAU) Ile-Ife. It is on record that, since the 1970s Nigeria has gone on to establish numerous new Universities owned by the Federal, State and Private individuals. According to National Universities Commission (NUC, 2022) Nigeria presently has fourty nine (49) Federal Universities, fifty four (54) State Universities and ninety nine (99) Private Universities, totaling two hundred and two (202) altogether. Today there are thirty eight (38) Universities in the country operating academic programmes in geography.

The Need for Geography Education

Why do we even need geography education in the first place? Is it not possible to do without it? The answer is capital NO. Hence the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGS, 2011) noted that the importance of geography in the school curriculum cannot be over emphasized; therefore, we need to study geography education for the following reasons:

1. Geography enables students to understand their world locally and globally, makes wise decisions about the planet and its resources, and become critical thinkers.
2. Geography grapples with the key issues of our time, water, biodiversity, climate, natural hazards, population and much more. He noted that geography plays such a pivotal role in education because:
 - i. Geographic questions begins with the whys of where.
 - ii. After asking geographic questions, students acquire geographic resources. They collect data such as maps, satellite imagery and spread sheets from their own field work. They analyze this geographic data and understand relationships across time and space.
 - iii. Geographic investigations are often value laden and involves critical-thinking skills
 - iv. Finally, students present the results of their investigations using geographic tools such as web Geographic Information System (GIS) and desk top GIS. Their

investigations usually spark additional questions and the resultant cycle is the essence of geographic investigation.

3. Students study geography to understand that the earth is changing. Then they scientifically and analytically think about why it is changing. And they even dig deeper than that. Should the earth be changing in this way? Is there anything that I can do about it or that I should be doing about it? This not only captures the heart of spatial thinking-inquiry and problem-based learning-but also empowers students to become decision makers, to make a difference in this changing world of ours.
4. Geography helps students to understand the spatial distribution of resources and the necessity for their intelligent management.
5. Geography enables us to appreciate nature and help us develop a sense of responsibility towards our society.
6. Geography therefore, is not simply just a “nice to have” subject for an already crowded educational curriculum. It underpins all other disciplines. It is essential for grappling with the essential issues of time.

From the foregoing therefore, geography is a social science subject that deal with current and emerging fundamental environmental issues and how man in his wisdom proffer solutions in order to make the environment a safe place for all.

Revitalizing Geography Education in Nigeria

Revitalization in simple terms means to “restore something to life” or “give it a new life”. (www.vocabulary.com), similarly, the Cambridge Dictionary defines revitalization as the process of making something to grow, develop, or become successful again. Furthermore, revitalization is also seen as the action of imbuing something with new life and vitality (www.oxforddictionary.com). From the foregoing definitions of revitalization, the researchers are not of the opinion that there is a dead geography in Nigeria or elsewhere in the world. But the researchers are looking at the possibility of giving geography a better and new out look to enable it meet adequately the growing challenges of many geographic issues that confronts us in Nigeria. In view of this therefore, to make geography come alive in Nigeria, the following steps were suggested for consideration:

1. **Provision of good and well equipped geography laboratory in schools:** Well equipped geography laboratories should be put in place for conducive teaching and learning environment.
2. **Use of effective teaching methods:** Geography teachers must ensure the use of effective teaching methods that sustains the interest of students in the classroom e.g. debates, inquiry methods etc
3. **GIS and remote sensing:** Practical aspects of GIS and remote sensing should be well taught by qualified teachers and should be given priority attention in the curriculum. We all know that data from remote sensing can be used in vast areas such as; forestry, environment, agriculture, telecommunication, transportation etc.

4. **Formation of geographical societies in schools:** This will go a long way in developing and sustaining the students' interest in the subject.
5. **Employment of quality geography teachers:** It is very dangerous to have unqualified teachers teaching geography. When this happens the interest and future of the students and the nation is jeopardized. Therefore, for the betterment of the subject and the students there is the need to invest in good and qualified geography teachers.
6. **Promote the teaching of local geography:** A popular Nigerian adage says that charity begins at home. This is because local geography affords students the opportunity to explore their environment; this ensures that learning begins from known to unknown.
7. **The use of field trips:** Field trip is any learning activity that is carried out by a group of students with their teacher (s) outside the classroom. The idea of going elsewhere outside the four walls of the classroom alone motivates the students and thus developing their interest to learn.
8. **Use of Instructional Materials:** Instructional materials facilitate students' understanding of a given lesson. Therefore, if the right kinds of materials are used at the right time, it will go a long way in making geography come alive once more.
9. **Introduction of Mentorship:** Students' should be given the opportunity to choose amongst their teachers those with high level of integrity and professionalism to serve as their mentors throughout their stay in the school; this will help the students to develop the right attitude in the study of geography.
10. **Adequate Funding of Geographical Activities:** Adequate funding of geographical activities in schools such as field trips, geographical societies, debates, quiz etc will go a long way in revitalizing geography in Nigeria.
11. **Provision of Research Grants:** Research grants should be extended to geographers as well and not restricted to the pure sciences alone.

Political Stability in Nigeria

Political stability is viewed as a condition of steadiness and firmness of political institutions and processes within the political system as well as absence of threat to an existing pattern of authority and behavior (Abdulrsheed, 2007). Similarly, Usman (2000) opined that political stability of any form of government has to involve the stable realization of the political essence of that form of government. Going further, he noted that the political stability of a feudal monarchy means the continuation of the exercise of power by the heirs of the dynasty or dynasties who produce the monarch. The political stability of the type of democracy provided for in our constitution means the contribution of the exercise of power by those freely elected by the people of this country for specific periods with definite mandates which conform to the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy clearly defined in our constitution.

Stability according to Nnamani (2010) is the fundamental public good. It is not just a domestic public good. It has become an international public good. The nations and peoples

of the world are concerned about instability in one country or one region. Shaun (2001) observed that the need for political stability was paramount. According to him, without political stability there could be no security for either life or liberty, and thus man's existence could never be anything more than a chaotic, violent and bloody struggle for power-a condition of war of every man-against every man. Paul (2011) reiterated that the problem of political stability has been the dilemma of how to secure enduring, legitimate political order. Political instability affects all facets of a nation's life-economic, religious, social, security, education and even general apprehension amongst its citizens. According to www.quora.com political stability is the ability of people's government to share, access, or competes for power through non violent political processes and to enjoy the collective benefits and services of the state.

Nigeria has been politically stable over the years; infact since the return of power from the military government to democratically elected government in 1999 Nigeria has never again witnessed any truncation of her democracy, there has been peaceful transition from one civilian government to another, even from a ruling political party to an opposition political party in 2015. Apart from the high political tension witnessed during the build up to the 2015 general elections, the political climate in Nigeria has been peaceful and relatively stable.

The Concept and Meaning of Security

Security is a very important business for any state or region if meaningful development is to be achieved. This is because development and progress cannot be achieved in chaotic situations. Hence, Gabi (2017) observed that security is a situation where by the rate of crime, anti-social vices that result from high rate of unemployment and gross restiveness are arrested through job creation and acquisition of the right skills. He further maintained that security simply implies peace of mind or the absence of fear or absence of threat to acquired values. Tunde (2005) noted that security is the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic and political power.

In the opinion of Buzan (1991) security is a political, economic, social and environmental threat that affects the individual as well as the state at national and international levels. In a similar vein, Stan cited in Salisu, Isah and Abdulkadir (2017) claimed that security is the mechanism put in place to avoid, prevent, reduce or resolve violent conflicts, and threats that originate from other states, non-state actors or structural socio-political and economic conditions. Gabi (2017) noted that Nigeria as a country is confronted with so many security challenges ranging from ethnic and religious crisis, armed robbery, militancy, kidnapping, terrorism, assassination, communal crisis, thugery and so many other petty crimes committed on daily basis. Some of the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria stems from the following: Corruption, injustice, bad governance, feeling of marginalization, unemployment (particularly youth), lack of sincerity on the part of leaders, mismanagement of resources, poor education, and non adherence to rule of law, impunity in governance and the mentality of winners take all syndrome in the nation's polity.

Security and political stability of any state are interwoven and interconnected, this is because without guaranteed security there can be no political stability, this means that security is everybody's business, for a stable political climate to be achieved government must guarantee all forms of security in the country (food, economic, health, environmental and political security).

Geography Education, Political Stability and Security in Nigeria

Geography expertise can be of great importance in helping organizations, individuals and nations operate more efficiently and make better informed decisions (National Academies of Science, Engineering, Medicine, NAP, 1997). Geography education has contributed in various ways in enhancing political stability and security in Nigeria. Some of the ways include:

- a. **Technological hazards:** Geography education contributes both in theory and practice to risk assessment for technological hazards such as floods and drought.
- b. **Information Service:** One of the main focuses of geography is the spreading of information from place to place. The Geographic Information System (GIS) which offers such service comes handy here. The Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NIMET) also does excellently in this regard, by providing first hand and timely information on climate change and weather forecast which goes a long way in boosting agricultural production.
- c. **Hunger:** Geographers are working to help policy makers understand the structure and root causes of hunger. We know that when hunger is eliminated enduring peace can be guaranteed.
- d. **Dispute Resolution:** Geographers frequently serve as expert witnesses in court cases where the legality of policies is tested. This greatly minimizes unrest and violence.
- e. **Water Resources:** Geographers are always on hand to give expert advice on the management of water resources in a country. Such advice usually leads to better management of water for the benefit of all.
- f. **Urban Planning:** Geographers makes policies for urban planning. Well planned cities will lead to peaceful co-existence.
- g. **Remote Sensing Data:** This has the potential to improve capability and understanding of the environment as well as contribute to quality of life of citizens. Understanding the environment and improved quality of life can enhance peace and stability.
- h. **Agricultural Production:** The greatest employer of labour in Nigeria is agriculture. To boost agricultural production farmers need meteorological information which is provided by geographers. Abundant food guarantees food security which often translates to peace and stability.
- i. **Publications of Research Findings:** Through publications of research findings in professional journals and other open literature outlets. Scholarly publications to

influence society's general "climate of understanding" about issues of national interest and society's opinions are transmitted to decision makers for action.

Conclusion

Geography is a social science subject which deals with the interaction between people and their environment. However, since its inception in 1948, when it was officially included in the Nigeria's school curriculum, it has not enjoyed the desired support in our educational system which has greatly hampered its growth and thus unable to fulfill its full potentials. Even though the subject has undergone several changes in terms of its curriculum content with the inclusion of some important fields in it such as Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing more still needs to be done to further develop it, hence revitalizing it will make the subject more relevant to the present realities and thus prove that the subject is not just a "nice to have" for an already crowded curriculum but a tool for sustainable national development, political stability and security in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are believed to be useful in revitalizing geography education for political stability and enhanced security in Nigeria:

1. Field trip should be made compulsory at all levels of educational system
2. The use of local geography as a starting point for geography teaching and learning should be encouraged at all levels.
3. Only qualified teachers should be employed to teach geography, particularly new fields such as GIS and Remote Sensing should be given priority.
4. Government should create enabling environment for private sector investment so as to create job opportunities for our teeming unemployed youths in order to curb youth restiveness.
5. Government at all levels should ensure the protection of life and property of citizens in the country.
6. Government should ensure adequate supply of relevant instructional materials at all levels of our educational system.

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