

# GEOGRAPHY TEACHING IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE MISSING LINKS

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## **Abstract**

Geography has acquired an interesting dimension in most secondary schools in the developed world. The method of teaching has also been fine-tuned to accommodate recent developments in the fields of science and technology. In the developing world, and Nigeria particularly, the teaching of geography needs some stimulation and reawakening. This paper highlights some missing links in the teaching of geography and how the subject can be better delivered to make it more interesting, stimulating and appreciated.

## **Introduction**

Although geography has continued to occupy a place among the subjects taught in secondary schools in Nigeria, much of the interests and enthusiasm which decked the subject have waned in recent years. Evidence from some parts of the country shows the increasing poor response by students. Ademneru (1984), in a study of secondary schools in Ondo State, has highlighted some of the problems to include lack of incentives, inadequate textbooks, lack of teaching aids, poor staffing, role conflict with social studies, attitude of the taught, and the role of agencies. Equally, Okpo (1982), in a sober reflection of geography teaching from 1900 to 1980 has pinpointed the two major problems facing the subject in secondary schools. The problems, she observed, include acute shortage of well-qualified geography teachers, and lack of relevant teaching equipment. These problems have not changed considerably to date.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the missing links in geography teaching in recent years which if given the necessary attention could go a long way to enhance the warm reception and acceptability of the subject in most secondary schools in the country. These neglected aspects of geography teaching include: the inability of geography teachers to highlight the relevance of the subject to national objectives and problems, ineffective utilization of teaching aids, the negligence of field excursions, and the inadequate utilization of local examples coupled with lack of emphasis on local geography (Ayeni and Faniran, 1990).

## **Lack of Emphasis on the Relevance of the Subject to National Objectives and Problems**

The failure of most geography teachers to relate the subject to the immediate needs and aspirations of the people is, to a large extent, responsible for the students poor response. The subject, like economics, commerce, physics, and chemistry, should go beyond the development of abstract reasoning (Fabongbe, 1969; Johnston, 1985; Barbour, 1990). It should be related to the children's home area, what they see around them and what they can compare and contrast with what obtains elsewhere. Geography teachers are often confronted by students with the notion that geography is a "dry and difficult" subject concerned mainly with the location and description of places; and it was not until a serious campaign was embarked upon in support of geography by intimating them about the "fertile areas" that lay within the domain of geography for professionalism on secondary school graduation that the response improved. Students should be made to understand that geography is no longer confined to the study of events, and the location and description of places but the "it has been purposely re-oriented to finding solutions to some of the problems encountered by man, especially in his relationship with the environment" (Ojo, 1981; Ologe, 1990). In other words, geography has adopted and acquired a problem-solving approach. In the teaching of geography in schools and colleges, therefore, the relationship between man and his environment should be so emphasized as to create in the students an awareness of the intricate relationships between the various elements of the environment (Ebisemiju, 1981). For example, in the teaching of soil erosion: causes, prevention and effects, geography teachers should be able to relate the effect of excessive cropping on agricultural land and the accompanying implication on the efficient functioning of the ecosystem.

In the teaching of geography in secondary schools, teachers should learn to be innovative and ingenious. These qualities are required for the effective and efficient teaching of the subject. In a

situation where a teacher cannot teach intelligently any geographic concept or theory, the tendency is for the students to conclude that the subject is a difficult one. In this regard, geography teachers should aim at upgrading their state of knowledge. The need to attend geographical conferences, seminars and workshops in order to keep abreast with recent trends at one's expense should not be over-emphasized. This is inevitable given the current socio-economic circumstances in the country.

### **Ineffective Utilization of Teaching Aids**

Recent studies from secondary schools in the Edo State (1999) show that one in every twenty schools uses teaching aids, such as the world globe, Stevenson's screen, wind vane, rain gauge, maps and the like. The inability of most secondary schools to afford teaching aids has been attributed largely to poor finance. Given that there is little or no finance, geography teachers with the collaboration of (heir students should be able to prepare teaching aids. For instance, if teachers of Biology could collect specimens with the help of their students, and agricultural science students could harness the support of their students in running a farm; a geography teacher has no excuse for not requesting the assistance of the students in the collection and assemblage of geographical teaching aids, which when obtained should be stored for use in the future. For instance, their students, and agricultural science teachers could harness the support of their students in running a farm a geography teacher has no excuse for not requesting the assistance of the students in the collection and assemblage of geographical teaching aids, which when obtained should be stored for use in the future. In this connection, I would wish to commend the activities of the Part II geography students of the College of Education Ikeru-Ekiti, for the preparation of models and teaching aids. According to Adetunbem (1984), "some construct Stevenson's screen, make models of erosional features, draw maps and made models mesh... some of the items are already stored in a geography laboratory ready for exhibition and later for sale. It is an annual programme" Geography teachers in other states should take a clue from the above example and involve the students in similar laudable venture. Not only will this reinforce interest in the students, it will also improve their appetite for creativity and appreciation of their environment. In Edo State, the financial situation of secondary schools is likely to improve as the retention of some percentage free paid per student could be utilized in part for the buying of teaching aids and other equipment.

In addition, students should be encouraged to draw maps and sketches. It is appalling to note that the present day geography student cannot draw maps and make sketches, even on simple features like fold mountains, river capture, etc. An experience with the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary level, attests to this anomaly, of the 251 scripts marked only about 53 illustrated their answers with diagrams. This ugly situation can be improved upon through efficient supervision by the teacher, and constant practice by the students.

### **The Negligence of Field Excursions**

Field excursion is at present a neglected aspect of geography teaching. The reasons adduced by schools for their inability to organize field excursions included lack of financial resources, the problems of size and control of students, and the problems of transportation. While these problems are real, geography teachers should be able to design a system whereby students are grouped into manageable sizes and led on field excursions to the localities of the school, village or town. The availability of buses for hire abundant in many States will make this strategy feasible. An alternative for this could be to identify a feature of geographical interest and encourage students to visit them within a specified time limit and make some write-ups. The latter approach, however, should not "usurp" the place of the former whose primary objectives are to enable the students exercise keen observation of the environment, acquire geographical knowledge of that environment and identify the observable problems.

In circumstances where individual student field excursion is arranged, efforts should be made to involve the measurement, calculation and documentation of physical and human features within the locality. The purpose of this is to guide the students into making observations in a particular direction rather than looking at the field excursion as an occasion to visit a new place. For instance, in a visit to a nearby farm, students should be made to indicate the size of the farm, the activities taking place in the farm at the time of visit, the crops planted and the conditions necessary for their growth.

### **Lack of Emphasis on Local Geography**

Another aspect of geography teaching that should be emphasized among geography teachers is the utilization of local examples and the teaching of local geography. One notable reason for student's dislike for the subject is that it has a broad-based syllabus and that it tends to be abstract. However, experience has shown that where the subject is taught with reference to the local geographic phenomena, students appear to make meaningful contributions. Also, in a situation where a topic as "agencies modifying land form" weather, running water, ice, wind and waves, are taught, vlsuafaids could go a long way into preparing the students' mind to observe Hie land modifying agencies that are available in the local environment.

Another very interesting aspect of geography teaching not popularly practiced in most secondary schools is local geography. Local geography is defined as the study of the child's home environment by assembling and analyzing its physical and human resources with a view to assessing its potentials and problems in development (Majasan, 1969). It is no longer disputed that many students do not know much about their locality. While this could be attributed to the exclusion of local geography in the G.C.E. O/L syllabus (for example, home country in the syllabus implies Nigeria), it is the duty of teachers to reinforce their understanding of local geography through assignments and group discussions. To popularize this approach, for instance, in teaching the geography of Nigeria, it would be advisable to, first of all, test their basic knowledge of their Local Government Area, and then the State.

### **The Introduction of Computer Education and Geographical Information System (GIS)**

At an elementary level, computer studies and Geographical Information System (GIS) should be introduced into the secondary schools. Not only will this stimulate the interest of students for geography, it would also brighten their chances of further education within those specialized areas of Geography.

### **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, we are strongly persuaded that geography will acquire a wider acceptability among secondary school students if these neglected aspects are accorded their due attention. This requires dedication to duty on the part of the geography teachers whom we now see as the architects of their fortune if the result of their teaching improves, and misfortune if distaste for the subject continues. The teacher should look at the subject from a practical angle and as one of the most adoptable and closest to real life.

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