

IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY IN MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT

Samuel E. Egbehenyo

Abstract

Geography as an environmental science centred among other things on how to produce the required manpower for the effective utilization of the scarce natural resources, because they are essential to the development of the nation. This paper consequently discussed the various definitions of geography, stated the objectives which include ability to do critical things through the geographical processes of observing, recording, analyzing, concluding and generalizing. It also explained the importance of geography in manpower development, identified the problems associated and offered some recommendations which include making the subject compulsory in Nigerian educational curriculum and provision of necessary facilities to enhance its teaching and learning.

Introduction

Geography has been defined by many schools thus: Carl Snar, one of the founding fathers of American Geography defined it as the science of places.

Paul Vidal De la Blanche of the French School of Geography saw it as the science of places concerned with the qualities and potentialities of countries.

Clearly of the English School of Geography wrote that geography is concerned to know the earth in its total characters, in terms of the combination produced among them (Gamier, 1975).

Richard Haeshobone defined geography as a subject that is concerned with the provision of accurate, orderly, rational description and interaction of the variable characters of the earth surface (Hartshone, 1957).

Fellman, Getis and Getis (1995) defined geography as the study of spatial variation of phenomenon.

Geography is interested in understanding man's environment and its contribution have been concerned mainly with interpreting the environment so that it could be better appreciated by man, and in such a way as to establish the man-environment interrelationship as a functioning and interacting system (Ofomata, 1965). From the above definitions it 'will be seen that geography is a living and dynamic subject, as it is a link between the sciences and 'the humanities.

Manpower development can be defined as the complexity of process which aims at transforming human beings so that they can contribute more effectively to the economic and social progress (Hughes, 1976).

In other words, manpower development is concerned with the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Manpower can be classified broadly into unskilled, semi and skilled labour. It is in line of the foregoing that it is pertinent to consider the importance of geography in manpower development in Nigeria.

Objectives of Geography

The National Curriculum spelt out by the Federal Ministry of Education (1985) set the following objectives for geography:

1. To develop in students the ability to do critical thinking by considering the relationship between diverse facts by looking for both sides of a problem and by the usual geographical processes of observing, recording, analyzing, concluding and generalizing.
2. To provide students with a body of geographical knowledge which is interesting, useful in everyday life and adequate for the school certificate geography examination.
3. To develop in the student a geographical imagination which is the ability to visualize with the mind's eyes what conditions would be in places to which he has never been.
4. To establish in the student by means of field work the habit of observation and lively attention to what goes on around him.
5. To promote international understanding by means of knowledge of the interdependence of people and respectful acceptance of the differences among people of various regions.
6. To develop in students the capability to use and interpret maps doing this, whenever desirable by training in map making.

7. To appreciate the role of geography as a bridge subject between the sciences and the humanities, and by realizing the essential unity of all knowledge to help in closing the widening gap within our culture, between the technical and the literary.

In another development Okunrotifa (1977) opined that, one of the objectives of geography is to develop the students' ability to make worthwhile use of leisure teaching them to derive pleasure from the beauties of nature by making local trips and excursions.

In my personal opinion, geography should be accorded proper recognition and taught in all schools.

Nigeria has a lot of social and environmental problems that deserve geographical explanations. It is in realization of this that other Universities like Obafemi Awolowo He Ife, University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka to mention but a few, continued to revise their geography curriculum (Ayeni and Faniram, 1990).

Importance of Geography in Manpower Development

In order to produce enough manpower for tackling the diverse societal problems geography curriculum has been reformed under three main areas of specialization thus: Urban and regional planning, environmental resource management and mapping techniques (Onorkerhoraye, 1984).

As a result of recent serious recession in the Nigerian economy that has led to the gradual enthronement of applied geography both in research and university undergraduate curricula a significant research in geography is now problem solving oriented while geographers increasingly involved in offering solution to pressing national problems (Ayeni and Faniran, 1990).

The most important tool of environmental assessment and planning is map making. There is no other discipline that is capable in construction, interpretation and use of maps especially of interrelationships. In order to ensure rapid acquisition and display of mapable data, geographers have been involved in developments in the fields of remote sensing and computer cartography. The products of these become useful tools for environmental management, one of such developments in the Hyper-Graph-Based Data structure model which enables researcher to do data structures as they exist in nature thereby greatly facilitating both the creation of an information base and the analysis of interrelationship (Ayeni and Faniran, 1990). The hyper-graph-based system provides a comprehensive approach to building an information system, a characteristic which suits the complex nature of environmental planning. The new system can be used effectively in the analysis of relations among populations, land use and reform.

For effective studies on the environment in Nigeria some geographers embarked on specific research areas, for example; Ofomata (1965) worked on factors of soil erosion in Enugu area of Eastern Nigeria, Usoro (1969) worked on man's role in including rapid rates of erosion in Victoria Island, Oguntoyinbo (1976) also worked on solar energy as potential for environmental resources in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since quantitative revolution began in the mid 1970s a lot of manpower were produced in order to meet up with the demand for higher statistics usage in the society. For example problems such as factor and harmonic analysis and multiple regression. It can also be used to solve problems of regionalization, classification, time series, spatial organization and variation in geography (Gregory, 1963).

The provision of Geographic Information System (G.I.S.) introduced in the 1980s enhanced computer network of various scales and development of computer graphic and computerized mapping (Ayeni and Faniran, 1990).

Geography in Nigeria is both an academic and professional discipline and students of geography are trained in the fundamental concepts and methodology of the discipline as well as other specialized areas which are useful for a wide range of professions that want to utilize the skills and analytical techniques of the geography.

As a result of training in field work and travelling to different localities this make the geographer to easily to new environments (Okunrotifa, 1977).

The geographer is trained to appreciate the extra ordinary diversity and spatial organization of natural and man-made phenomena on the earth surface. That is geographers are known for their concern for man's responses to these differences or diversity in phenomena.

Geography students are also trained to interpret air photographs, remote sensing cartography, transportation, political, geography, hydrology and geomorphology.

Against this background, the unique qualities of geography have been identified and in view of

the skills and specialized training that geographers acquired, manpower can be provided in a number of professions that require the services of graduates of geography which are needed in business, teaching, public services, urban and regional planning, environmental and resource management etc (Onorkoraye, 1984).

Business

Geography is one of the disciplines that prepares its students for business. If business is defined as that area of human activity which deals with the production and consumption of goods and services, then geographers have suitable career in it.

As a result of geographical skill in map making and report writing, the geographer can be employed in business enterprises such as map and atlas-publishing, journalism, economic consulting firms, manufacturing companies, transport firms, travel agencies, retail and wholesale companies and tourism (Ologe, 1984).

Teaching

This is one of the areas where geographical training can lead directly especially as there is shortage of geography teachers at all levels of education and the need to train more geographers for teaching profession at both Secondary, Colleges and University levels (Omalle, 1966).

Public Services

Geography has major role to play in the administration of government departments because public administration in Nigeria as is in many other developing countries requires adequate knowledge of the human and physical environments being administered and also because development planning is a major component in public administration. The geographers are employed in government departments like agriculture, transport and administration. The geographers or companies are in better position to advise and take decision on key issues such as different spatial organization of firms and service centres, educational institution, health facilities, and distribution network for farm inputs and outputs (Olofin, 1986).

Urban and Regional Planning

The Nigerian urban and rural environments are undergoing remarkable changes that require scientific study with a view to anticipating and yielding future developments. By the nature of geographer's training he is quite competent to study the prevailing situation and plan effective management of urban and regional development. This is because geographers acquire some professional skills and knowledge needed by experts (Onorkoraye, 1984).

Environment and Resource Management

Geographers who have received training in the physical aspects are capable of contributing to physical planning in various capacities such as; studies of flood hazards in the river basin and storm damage along shore lines. These may determine the location of building and land use in the affected areas. Studies of the physical resource base in underdeveloped rural areas with a view to evaluating developmental possibilities, investigating factors affecting soil moisture and application of this knowledge in recommending cropping and conservation practices, weather forecasting relation to aviation (Olofin, 1986).

As a result of specialized skill provided by geography, the following geographers have featured prominently in Nigerian administration; A.L. Mabogunje was Chairman Planning of Federal Capital, Abuja, R.K. Udo served as Consultant to Population Commission, G.E.K. Ofomata was Chariman National Soil Conservation, and Jerry Gana has served as Director for Mass Mobilization (MAMSER) for several years (Ayeni and Faniran, 1990).

Problems Affecting Geography in Manpower Development

As laudable as geography is to manpower development, but it is faced with these problems.

Geography teachers are inadequate both in quantity and quality in Nigerian schools. This is more pronounced in the secondary schools.

A reasonable percentage of geography teachers have been teaching for more than ten years without updating their knowledge through seminars, workshops or conferences and even reading of current journals, thus, they are inefficient in teaching (Omalle, 1966).

Among Nigerian students, there are erroneous beliefs that geography is too wide and difficult to

grasp, and this creates fear in the minds of the students.

Most of the geography laboratories in the tertiary institutions are poorly equipped in terms of materials and resources thereby hindering effective teaching. Some of the geographical hardwares are expensive to buy, for example survey tool like theodolite cost over one million Naira at Makurdi.

Geography curriculum at the secondary school is wide and cumbersome especially as many topics are entrenched.

The period stipulated to train geographers in Nigeria is short especially as geography proper begins at the senior class in the secondary school. This is unacceptable.

The inability of the Nigerian Geographical Association to enforce a code of conduct whereby people without deep knowledge and background are allowed to teach the subject in the schools is a problem.

There is problem of under utilization of skill and semi skilled geography manpower trained at the tertiary institutions especially situations whereby many holders of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) geography are not totally employed across the state.

At conferences and geographical seminars there are instances when conflicts of interest arise between the old generation geographers and modern geographers that study computer and can utilize such skill in data manipulation. For example at the 46th Annual National Conference of Association of Nigeria Geographers held at the Benue State University Makurdi.

Geography textbooks especially the foreign authored are often expensive to buy, therefore some school libraries contain few of such relevant texts for example -Geography and Man's Environment by Arthur Strahler and Allan Strahler is sold at three thousand Naira in Makurdi bookshop (personal survey).

Conclusion

Geography is indeed very important for manpower in Nigeria because of the interdisciplinary-nature of the subject.

This is justified by the fact that several environmental, social and economic problems derive their solution from geographical skills. It is indeed pertinent to encourage the teaching and learning of geography.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made.

1. In order to increase the numerical strength of geography teachers at the secondary school special incentives like scholarship award should be granted to geography students at the Colleges of Education or Universities.
2. Geography teachers should be encouraged to attend conferences, workshops or seminars regularly so as to be familiar with current researches. Allowances should also be paid to participants.
3. School proprietors and the government should provide sufficient fund in order to procure instructional materials for teaching geography. The resourceful geography teachers should improvise where possible.
4. Geography teachers should try to stimulate the interest of his students through organization of geography week, exhibition and geography fair in the school.
5. The Nigerian Geographical Association should endeavour to make their researches available to school and college libraries to keep the students abreast with recent works on geography.
6. Geography should be made compulsory in all levels of Nigerian education considering its tremendous role in manpower development.

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