The Role of Libraries in the Teaching of Geography in Schools and Teachers' Colleges

Introduction

Whereas observers are agreed that there is a decline in the standard of education generally in the country, they blame the decline on different causes. One is the phenomenal increase in the number of institutions and their enrolments between 1979 and 1985 Yabani[1], 1986, p. 16). The proliferation of educational institutions, including Teachers' Colleges, implies that recruitment into the colleges is no longer as competitive as the case was a few decades ago; with the result that such institutions are no longer likely to attract the best material for training (Obanya, 1982, p. 43).

Consequently, the phenomenal growth in the number of institutions has prevailed without concomitant improvement in facilities. This has unfortunately led to an upsurge in the number of non-teachers (those who have not been trained to teach) serving as teachers and teacher educators[2] (Ibid. p.43).

Other causes of poor academic performance include frequent changes of the education policy which hampers consistency in the management of the school system (Akande, 1987, p. 20); poor and corrupt financial management by some school principals Ifene,[4], 1987, p. 24). Finally, the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC)[5], Nigeria's highest advisory body on educational matters suggested that the yearly deterioration of standard in schools could be stemmed if more funds could be spared for primary education (The Guardian 28 May, 1987, p. 3).

While the foregoing observation relates to the general academic performance, the next section examines the performance, in Geography in particular for the purpose of this article.

Performance in School Certificate/GCE 'O' Level Geography

The issue at stake at the beginning of this section is whether or not the performance in Geography has improved. Table I contains School Certificate/GCE 'O' Level results in Geography for four years. Two categories of passes are considered for analysis, Pass (1 - 6) and Pass (7 - 8). The former represents credit and above and is considered effective for purposes of admission into higher institutions and employment, all things being equal. The latter is weak generally and for the purposes identified for the former category.

The averages of the pass (1-6)% and of the Pass (7-8)% for the sxi periods shown on the Table are 11.96% and 17.89% resspectively. Even a combination of the overall passes, that is, Pass (1-8) yields a meagre of 29.85%. This figure is under 30% and certainly a far cry from the normal average of 50%. The situation leaves the Fail % for the same period at a staggering mean of 66.69%.

Judging from the relatively fewer number of passes nation-wide, it appears that a missing link exists somewhere along the instructional chain of the subject. Viewed from another perspective, the fewer passes have been described as those who passed through the affected institutions and allowed the institutions to pass through them (Obanya,[6] 1982 p. 42). The higher number of failures would then represent those who passed, through the institutions without allowing the institutions to pass through them[7] (Ibid. p. 42), assuming in both cases that the institutions performed creditably in their instructional roles. We are now left with an assessment of the performance at the Grade II Certificate level.

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Performance at Grade II Teachers' Certificate Examinations

The only area in which data is readily available on Grade II Certificate results is limited to the Central Papers which are examined by the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) with Headquaters in Kaduna. These papers are English Language, Principle and Practice of Education, Arithmetic and Mathematics (Statistics of Education in Nigeria, 1980 - 1984, pp. 99 - 104). Other subjects, including Geography, are grouped under State Papers and are examined under arrangment by individual states.

However, under a special arrangment, the Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, sets 21 state papers and moderates the scripts for the 10 Northern States of Nigeria (Bamijoko,[8], 1985, p. 6). Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, joined the arrangment in 1986. To be eligible for an award of Grade II Certificate, a candidate is required to pass all the central papers including Teaching Practice and any four subjects from the list under the state papers usually comprising a conglomeration of subjects (Bamijoko, 1984 p. 3).

Table 2 shows some improvement in the percentage of passes in 1986 over 1985 for all the states except two, i.e. Bauchi, and Niger in Geography. Nevertheless, the predominantly higher percentage of failures for both years suggests that there is room for improvement in teaching strategies and in students performances in the subject.

Table 1

School Certificate/GCE 'O' Level Examination Results in Geography

Date	Total Entry	Total Sat	Total Pass (1-6)		Total Pass (7-8)		Overall Pass (1-8)		Fail	
			No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
May/June 1980	72,924	67,183	5,188	7.72	12,672	18.86	17,860	26.58	46,576	52.72
May/June 1982	106,017	93,431	13,787	14.75	16,497	17.66	30,284	32.41	63,147	67.58
Nov./Dec. 1982	49,975	41,153	4,049	9.8	8,266	20.1	12,315	29.92	28,838	70.1
May/June 1983	110,640	96,159	17,028	17.70	15,684	16.31	32,712	34.01	63,447	65.98
Nov./Dec. 1983	38,989	31,308	3,043	9.7	4,878	15.6	7,921	25.30	23,387	74.7
May/June 1984	118,306	103,456	12,507	12.08	19,463	18.81	31,970	30.90	71,486	69.09

Source: Adapted from Statistics of Education In Nigeria 1980 - 1984 Pages 80, 87, 88, 91, 92, 96.

Table 2

Grade II Teachers' Certificate Examination Results in Geography in the 10 Northern States and Abuja 1985 - 86

States	1985					1986				
	Total Candidates	Total Pass		Total Fail		Total Candidates	Total Pass		Total Fail	
		No.	%	No.	%		No.	%	No.	%
Kaduna	1215	346	24.48	869	71.52	1755	574	32.71	1181	67.29
Plateau	1915	774	40.42	1141	59.58	1887	911	48.28	976	51.72
Borno	2359	390	16.53	1969	83.47	2453	590	24.05	1863	75.95
Benue	1666	397	23.83	12.69	76.17	2497	1495	59.87	1002	40.13
Bauchi	893	408	45.69	485	54.31	1373	607	44.21	766	55.79
Sokoto	795	104	13.08	691	86.92	581	146	25.13	435	74.87
Kano	2130	251	11.78	1879	88.22	626	166	26.52	460	73.48
Gongola	1645	697	42.37	948	57.63	1710	766	44.80	944	55.20
Niger	1725	514	29.80	1212	70.26	2157	478	22.16	1679	77.84
Kwara	1091	342	31.35	749	68.65	779	294	37.74	485	62.26
FCT, Abuja	-	-	-	-	-	83	35	42.17	48	57.83
TOTAL	15432	4220	27.35	11212	72.65	14900	5061	33.97	9839	66.03

Source: Teacher Education Division, Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. May, 1987

From the assessment of available data on the results of school and college Geography (Tables 1 and 2), it is very clear that the performance is low on the average. The situation then calls for serious concern on the part of the teacher and the taught in the first place, and on the part of government and the tax-paying public on the other. Undoubtedly, one meaningful way of expressing such concern lies in a search for determinants which are capable of raising the general performance, in the teaching of the subject and in the examination results of students. And that the schools and colleges themselves constitute major hunting grounds for the search, is hardly contestible. This formed the *raison d' etre* for the conduct of a project in schools and colleges in Zaria town by the present writer.

The Project

The project was conducted in January, 1987 and it comprised three main stages:

1. A survey of Secondary Schools and Teachers' Colleges in Zaria Town to determine their number and location.
2. The administration of questionnaires to Geography Teachers in the Schools and Colleges in an attempt to assess the learning situation of Geography in the institutions. Moreover, personal interviews were conducted to enable the writer and some teachers on one hand, and some school principals on the other to chat on the assessment.
3. Analysis of the questionnaires.

The survey revealed the existence of sixteen post primary institutions in Zaria including those in Shika, Kabomo and Samaru. These are thirteen secondary schools, three Teachers' Colleges, and one Government Commercial College. The questionnaires were distributed to teachers of Geography in all the institutions. At the end of the day, 30 questionnaires were collected from 30 Geography teachers from 12 of the 16 institutions.

The respondents were requested to comment freely on the position of teaching and learning of Geography in their school/college under particular headings, according to the questionnaire. One of such headings and which is of interest to this article is the one which relates to the position of teaching resources. Typical responses under this heading include:

"Resources are grossly inadequate"

"Nothing to write home about"

"The school does not have atlases, topographical sheets, maps, globe, textbooks, ... no weather station".

Personal interviews between this writer and some school principals confirm a dearth of resources for school-college Geography. Where resources are absent, and at best inadequate, neither teaching nor learning can be expected to be effective, let alone good performances at examinations.

Clearly, a good understanding of map reading, for

instance, can scarsely be achieved without sufficient exercises in such aspects as scales and measurements, identification of relief features and map interpretation. But without the topograpahical sheets and related resources, the exercise cannot be performed and the required knowledge may not be gained. Similarly, the observation and recording of weather information may never take off without the weather instruments with which the observation needs be made.

A student may not fully understand the ways of life of people in other parts of our contry and the world at large without the use of aids like maps, atlases, models, books and photographs which reveal the nature and character of the related physical and cultural landscape or environment. The acquisition of such knowledge is necessary not only for good performances at examinations, but it is also important for developing in the learner, a sympathetic feeling for others and ultimately for preparing him/her for effective citizenship.

What the argument boils down to is that learning cannot take place when the learner's response to the learning environment is passive. It takes place when the learner actively interacts with the learning environment. The active participation of the geography student in the observation and recording of weather information, for example, would imply the availability of aids which will enhance his/her active interaction.

This idea is strengthened by one of the basic points in a constructivist view of learning. It states that "learning does not occur by the learner responding in a passive way to the environment, but by actively interacting with it". The centre for studies in science and mathematics education, 1986). A learning situation, therefore, without the necessary resources cannot be anything but passive.

Moreover, according to the personal project mentioned above, the scarsity of resources for Geography teaching was attributed to the very poor and inadequate financing of many schools. This forms the basis of the contention, sometimes made, that the situation could be improved if the teacher is resourceful and capable of sourcing teaching aids locally. This paper hails the resourcefulness to ensure the good quality of improvised aids.

Thus finance seems to play a dominant role in the provision of precision equipment such as weather instruments. But when the nation, as we are told, is worse off financially, how can the situation be salvaged? Perhaps, this is where the library can play a very fundamental role.

The Role of the LIbrary in the Provision of Geographic Resources for Schools

One might hasten to suggest the fussion of say eight schools pooling their meagre finances which may be sufficient for procuring a good assemblage of resources for the teaching of school Geography. Such an assemblage can be set up in a selected Library where it is accessible for use by each of the contributing schools. Government and communities may undertake to equip the Library in this way for the benefit of a target group of schools. This way, a fully equipped weather station may be set up in the Library compound.

Similarly, a fully equipped Geographic Resource Room could be set up in a section of the Library. The equipage in the room may include all classes and types of maps such as those showing: the world wind system, movement of ocean currents; relief features; mineral and agricultural resources; soil type; natural regions (vegetational characteristics) and Population distribution.

The room may further hold resources for exercises in map reading and interpretation such as topographical sheets and associated instruments such as mapograph and stereoscopes. Different types and sizes of globes could be provided. In addition to the foregoing examples, the Library would be equipped to hold its traditional wares - books, encyclopaedia, dictionaries, reference books, magazines, periodicals etc. which relate to school Geography as indeed other school subjects.

As far as possible, the strategic location of the library within a given locality should enable it provide central place services for the target group of schools and colleges. This implies that in case of sighting a new library for the use advocated here, efforts should be made to pick a sight which is or nearly equidistant to all the affected colleges. Moreover, there will be a need to draw up an acceptable schedule for the use of the resources by the affected colleges to avoid clashes of interest.

In conclusion, this article humbly but firmly holds that at a time when most colleges are faced with a dearth of teaching resources and school performances generally but specifically in Geography examinations are low, the library can be made to play a far-reaching remedial role. To the extent that the Library is equipped and entrusted to serve, to that extent will the remedial role be fulfilled; to that extent will our efforts to raise the performance in college Geography examinations began in earnest.

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