

CONSIDERING THE DETERMINANTS OF SELECTING GEOGRAPHY AS A DISCIPLINE: THE CASE OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILORIN, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Owing to the observed drop in students' enrollment in geography, the study examined some of the factors that possibly influence the choice of Geography in secondary schools in Ilorin, Nigeria. Literatures were reviewed to buttress the findings of the study. The study is basically a descriptive survey; with questionnaire constructed and administered to respondents, who were students in secondary schools. Frequency counts and percentages were used in analyzing the data. Prominent findings indicate that out of the 200 students who took the survey, only 96 (48%) of the respondents offered geography because it is related to their future career. While 40% of the geography students did not like the teacher's method of teaching while 64.0 % affirmed that the teachers do not make use of teaching aids in teaching geography. Only 35.0 % of the students however agreed that their choice was muted because they enjoyed the geography lessons and that the teacher's attitude was significant in their decision. If teachers are well trained, encouraged and motivated, proper guidance and counseling is put in place and the geography curriculum is given a proper review, then the choice of geography by students will not be negatively skewed. Geography needs to be promoted by all geographers that the society might not suffer from its absent or inadequate representation in the field of advancement.

Key Words: geography curriculum, secondary school,

INTRODUCTION

The survey of students' choice of subjects at school certificate level in Ilorin became necessary due to the fact that early introduction of Geography education into the curricular in schools in Ilorin town, Nigeria received very low turn up. Such dampened enrollment was due to the non-conducive economic and religious factors. People from this area are engaged predominantly in weaving and so wanted their children to take after them doing the same work they do. It was those who were not strong enough for the weaving that had the opportunity of being sent to school.

Educational disparity was sharply observed with religious inclination. Parents thought that education would enhance conversion into Christianity and in view of this, western education was not embraced. Coupled with these a sharp decline in the number of students that offer geography at the senior secondary level in Ilorin was noted, despite the importance of Geography knowledge generally in school curriculum.

Although the over-all philosophy and objectives of education in Nigeria states among others that: the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal education opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (Fed. Rep. of Nig, 1981, p. 7) several factors however influence individual decision and choices. This term “influence” refers to the ability to produce an effect that affects the character of a person and “choice” refers to the right to choose and or the ability to select out of a number of things and take a decision. In consequence therefore, the choice of geography by students is influenced by the dynamics of socio-economic and some related personal factors.

The senior secondary school education (S.S.S.) represents the third stage in the current educational system known as 6-3-3-4. This system of education that was designed by the National Policy on Education in 1981, exposes the learner to as many disciplines as possible in the junior secondary school (J.S.S) and then allows them to make choices of subjects in the senior secondary school level (S.S.S). The core school subjects for senior secondary school education are as follows:

1. Mathematics
2. English
3. One Nigerian language
4. One of Physics, Chemistry and Biology
5. One of Literature in English, History and Geography
6. Agricultural science as a vocational subject.

Optional subjects include:- Economics, Bible Knowledge, Arabic Studies, Art, Commerce, Book-Keeping, French, Government, Home-Economics, Islamic Studies, Typewriting, Music, Technical Drawing, Physical Education, Health Science, Wood work and Shorthand.

Geography as a school subject is one of the most important subjects in secondary school education. Geography is relevant for both the students who are likely to continue to tertiary level and those who will not proceed. It equips students with a body of knowledge to make them functional and socially relevant in the fast changing world. Geography is a distinct and dynamic science and or social science discipline that deals with the study of man and his physical environment. It therefore helps young people to appreciate the value of their environment and its vast natural resources. As a subject, it is versatile, expressive and intellectually stimulating. It exhibits a correlation with all other school subjects. It instills in the students the need to appreciate and develop a sense of responsibility towards their own society.

Geography is a very wide but interesting subject, which touches on most other subjects such as the social studies or the social environmental studies. It calls for a lot of hard work to master and enjoy it at the S.S.S level but with the right attitude and approach it is usually a pleasure to learn it. Despite this, there has been an observable sharp decline in the number of students that offer geography at the senior secondary level in Ilorin. This was quite unlike Adeyemi (2010) who observed that more students opt for geography from the list of available optional subjects in Botswana. The various variables suspected to be responsible for this decline are explored in this paper: Teacher’s attitude and relationship with pupils has a very significant impact on the student’s attitude towards the subject. As Bajah (1975) said, it is an educational truism that a teacher graduate or non-graduate can only teach what he or she knows. Therefore it is very important that a secondary school teacher should be academically articulate in his area of specialization. The way he/she relates to the students and passes across his instructions goes a long way to affect the student’s responds and attitude towards the subject.

Student’s attitude and the peer group influence also have either positive or negative impacts on the subjects they offer. The student’s personal attitude towards education and learning and that of their peers do affect their performance and interest and hence what they end up doing. Parental influence on the choice of subject as parents especially the educated ones are known to dictate which subjects their children should take regardless of the student’s interest or potentials. Previous studies have indicated that home background

as well as the socio-economic status of parents are equally contributory factors that impact on the learners' choice on geography as a school subject. Bajah (1975) said "teaching science subjects in a developing country presupposes that students who study the subjects come in with some entry behaviour which to a large extent is dictated by the socio-economic and technological environment in which the students grew up".

The job prospect of geography related professions is closely related to why parents influence some of their children choices. This to a large extent may be due to the ignorance about how wide and how far geography knowledge could facilitate academic performance in different fields and professions. The role of guidance and counseling in the choice of school subject cannot be over emphasized. And this, in most cases is found lacking or not properly done.

In their twelfth year, students take the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). They are required to register for a minimum of seven and a maximum of nine subjects including English Language and mathematics which are two mandatory school subjects. Many of the subjects taken at the JSS level are offered in SSS, except in more depth. Students are streamed through testing and counseling into one of the three areas of concentration: academic (science or humanities), technical/commercial, or teacher education. The core of required courses for all students includes English language, a Nigerian language, mathematics, science (physics, chemistry, and biology), humanities (literature, history, or geography), and either an agricultural science or a vocational subject. Students also select three more subjects from a wide range of electives depending on each school's resources. The more common electives are Christian or Islamic religion; business subjects such as economics, commerce, and accounting; foreign languages; computer science; fine arts; physical education; food and nutrition; home management; clothing and textile; applied electricity; auto mechanics technical drawing, woodwork and metalwork. Thus this study is intended to cover students of senior secondary school level and how the mentioned variables have influenced the student's choice of geography. A decline in the yearly number of students' enrolment for geography at the senior secondary certificate examination level as observed by the researcher and their lack of keen interest in geography as a school subject were the motivation for the study.

Statement of the Problem

Students are faced with the problem of indecision when they are about to choose a subject, as a result of differences in opinion from various angles. This problem has plagued many Nigerian secondary school students for quite sometime. It is such a problem that must be looked into, knowing fully well that the place of secondary education cannot be over emphasized in the educational development of a nation. With good background, students still need to develop themselves on the subject areas they are keenly interested in and particularly that he has potentiality for. Lots of students have been found choosing subjects for senior school certificate examination not minding the aspect of their potentiality and the directive of the school counselor (where available). Hence the study was carried out to find out the factors influencing the choice of geography as a subject within the various school curricular in secondary schools in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are two folds and are to:

- 1) Identify from students the reasons behind their choice of Geography as a school subject over other optional subjects in the same category;
- 2) Explore the implications of the findings in this study for teacher education.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to find out the factors affecting the choice of geography in senior secondary school students in Ilorin. Specifically it examined the following factors that influence the choice of geography among secondary school students.

1. The student's attitude and aptitude towards offering geography in the study area.

2. Teacher's attitude/relationship to students as it influences choice of geography
3. The influence of students' peer groups.
4. The availability of instructional materials in geography
5. The wideness of the syllabus
6. Gender influence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies into the factors that influence students into making choice of school subject can be traced back to 1930s. Student's choice of subject according to Sellart (1983) has three main constraints, namely:

- Potential university aspirants were generally expected to take eight or more subjects, which led to the learners choosing subjects for which they have no distinct preference for.
- University entrance requirement often demands particularly for West African Examination Certificate (WAEC) at ordinary level or General Certificate of Education (GCE) and now the Senior Secondary Examination (NECO) which is presently been discriminated against.
- Optional subjects were time tabled against each other.

In the National concord (1993), it was discovered that factors such as the non-challant attitude of students to school work, students' lack of understanding of the subjects' basic concept and high student-teacher ratio, teachers' competence, past performance of students in the subject at the school certificate examination among others, influenced students' choice and performance. Other factors that determine student's choice of subjects are school setting, teacher-students relationship, interest and attitude and individuals in particular subjects, socio-cultural factors and attitude of parents and guardians and the influence of peer group on students

Geography generally helps children as well as adults to understand the concept of man versus his environment in his struggle to survive and overcome the problems militating against his progress. It also helps people appreciate the value of their natural resources which, when developed with care and diligence often help to improve their standard of living. Geography has a large role in government at the local, state and national levels. Such ministries and departments where geographers are highly needed include; works and transport, geological survey, water Corporation, mining, agriculture, civil aviation and a host of others. Ignorance about the opportunities that are available to geography students at the end of their training is very rampant. Many of the students who even offer geography do not know the future utility of the subject. As a result such questions as what are the geography related professions are asked or what is the current demand in the labour market.

Okediji (1983) holds that students in the fifth grade or form do select subjects on the basis of which and how prestigious and demanding the occupation the subject leads to is. Okediji thus concluded that students' choice of subject at ordinary level was largely felt to be influenced by intending future occupation. Owing to the nature of the subject matter, it falls within science subject, social science and even environmental science subjects, which actually places it as multidimensional. Except proper control is exercised, it is impossible to cover the scope of geography, no matter the length of the course. This has contributed to the poor perception of geography as a school subject by students hence, their (students) not wanting to offer the subject.

Some students act more from ignorance than self appraised shortcomings. Many of them do not know the relevance/importance of education to their lives. The attitude of students to school work influence the student's choice and performance on the long run and according to Okunrotifa (2008) apart from the inadequate academic background of pupils and the limited resources for geography teaching, the studies are a sad reflection on the quality of teaching offered in our schools. Peer groups according to Hayes (1981) have strong band wagon effect on the decision to select subjects by students. Of course "pupils subject

choice were more influenced by the peer group influence than by any other factor". The reason for this is not far fetched. Students have a strong feeling that once their friends offer a given subject, they should be able to offer the subject without any consideration being given to their innate capabilities

Dainton (1998) says the major factor responsible for the inability of students to offer geography rises from poor teacher-pupil relationship as the attractiveness and relevance of the subject were not being properly presented in the early stage of secondary education. Studies carried out by Alimi and Balogun (2010) showed positive relationship between teachers' attributes and students academic performance in Geography.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study was a descriptive survey type where questionnaires were administered to the respondents. The population for this study was made up of students of senior secondary schools (SS1 – SSIII) in Ilorin Kwara State. The study covered five secondary schools in Ilorin which were randomly selected, because of the size of the study area. In selecting the sampled schools, the author used purposive sampling method and geography students of senior secondary classes (SSI – SSIII) were considered random sampling technique was employed to select forty (40) students from each of the five schools sampled. Hence a total of two hundred students were sampled for the study.

Respondents were randomly selected during the course of questionnaire administration just to give equal chance of being selected to each student. A questionnaire with fifteen (15) items was constructed and used in the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (section A and B). Section A was on personal information of the respondent, while section B was designed to get information on factors that influence student's choice of geography. The author personally administered the questionnaires to the students, with the assistance of the teachers. This encouraged quick feedback with a 100% return of questionnaire administered.

In analyzing the data collected frequency counts and percentages were the statistical methods used. The simple percentage was computed for all items.

RESULT

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent. It indicated that 53 % of the respondents were male while 47% were female. The distribution of the respondents according to the class of subject that they offer shows that 16% of the respondents were pure Science students, 23.5 % were Arts students and 28.5 % took the Social science subjects while the remaining 32 % offered Commercial subjects.

Table 1: Participants' Distribution

Sex	Frequency	%
Male	106	53
Female	94	47
Total	200	100
Class of Subject		
Science	32	16
Arts	47	23.5
Social Sciences	57	38.5
Commercial	64	32
Total	200	100

Table 2: General Attitude of Respondents to Each Item on the Questionnaire

S/N	ITEMS	AGREED %	DISAGREED %
1.	I don't like the method the geography teacher uses	80 (40.0%)	120 (60.0%)
2.	Our geography teacher does not make use of teaching aids.	128 (64.0%)	36 (36.0%)
3.	I choose geography because I enjoy the lessons	70 (35.0%)	65 (65.0%)
4.	My geography teacher's attitude towards student is good	88 (44.0%)	56 (56.0%)
5.	Geography lessons are not regular so I decided not to offer it.	102 (51.0%)	49 (49.0%)
6.	My career teacher has a lot of influence on my choice of geography	146 (73.0%)	54 (27.0%)
7.	I offer geography because my friends also offer it	120 (70.0%)	60 (30.0%)
8.	Other students look down on those offering geography	34 (17.0%)	166 (83.0%)
9.	My friends do not offer geography so I don't	62 (31.0%)	138 (69.0%)
10.	I choose geography because I love and understand it Geography is easy to pass	90 (45.0%)	110 (55.0%)
11.	Geography is too abstract to understand	136 (68.0%)	64 (32.0%)
12.	The scope of geography is too wide so I didn't chose it	83 (42.0%)	117 (58.0%)
13.	There is too much to learn and read and I don't have time so I don't offer geography	138 (69.0%)	62 (31.0%)
14.	I like the diversity and scope of geography that is why I choose it.	102 (51.0%)	98 (49.0%)
15.	It is related to my future career	84 42.0%)	116 (58.0%)

DISCUSSION

One of the findings of this research showed that there was no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students towards the offering of geography in the study area. Therefore the attitude of the students towards offering geography was not gender biased. It was also found that students' attitudes towards the offering of geography was greatly influenced by teachers poor teaching methods during the teaching and learning process along with the teachers attitude towards the students. This was similar to the findings of Okunrotifa (2008). According to Adeyemi (2010) Students look up to their teachers to provide role models and so might want to choose the subjects being taught by the teachers. In boosting the learners' adequate career choice especially in geography as a subject, Okunrotifa (2008) then opined that geography teachers should under go a study in career counseling technique in their teacher education programmes with the aim of efficiently guiding their students.

The scope of the geography syllabus which a lot of students agreed was too wide is another major finding of this research work. This was similar to the finding of Faniran (1980) that "one major criticism against geography is the wide scope and lack of proper focus of its curriculum/syllabus. This factor he further iterated had contributed to the low number of students registering for the geography subject in Nigerian high schools. Furthermore, it was identified was that the Career Counselor's role equally impact positively on student's potential to select courses, when the benefits of counselling services are adequately provided. It showed that the career teacher had a lot of influence on the student's choice of subject and geography as a school subject. This might be because more light is been shed on the importance of geography and its relevance to several professions, therefore frequent workshops for students on career choice is necessary. It is highly imperative that students are promptly and adequately guided on the relationship between their intended future careers and the subjects to choose from at school. This dimension was corroborated by Lazarowitz and Lazarowitz (2006) who opined that students' subjects' selection at school can be affected by personal factors.

CONCLUSION

From the research findings, it was established that difference in the attitude of senior secondary students towards offering geography is a significant factor that affects learners in their choices. This was equally the case with the learners' attitudes towards geography teachers and vice versa. To boost the potential that geography would be adequately selected by learners especially majoring in science-based disciplines, teachers' choice and application of teaching methods must so commensurate while learners are to be encouraged and motivated along with proper guidance and counseling perspectives. It is important to emphasis that geography curriculum should regularly be reviewed while simultaneous, the strategies for improving the learners' emotionality for adequate stimulation should be put in place.

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