

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NEED FOR PRESERVATION: THE ROLE OF GENERAL STUDIES PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria, many archaeological sites, museums, indigenous technology and moral values, etc. are yearning for preservation. The infiltration of western culture and modernity in Nigerian cultures has reduced the importance of our cultural heritage. Humanities Unit in the School of General Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka was used to highlight the importance of cultural heritage and its preservation. This is because the unit has a culture-based course in its curriculum. A qualitative research method was adopted for the research. Students from different faculties were interviewed during seminar

classes. This was analysed using content analysis. Secondary data was obtained from written materials on cultural heritage and education. The findings show that Humanities Unit as one of the units in GSP exposes students of different ethnic groups and background cultures other than their own through the understanding of cultural heritage and the need for preservation.

Key words: - Culture, Cultural Heritage, Preservation, General Studies Programme, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has abundant cultural heritage which is closely associated with the communities and cannot be separated from values perceived by the local people and traditional philosophy. In this 21st century, the General Studies Programme (GSP) was positioned to make the students better citizens of tomorrow who would live in harmony in a multicultural society. Students in the higher institutions came from different cultural beliefs and values. For them to live harmoniously with others, people's cultural heritage and ways of life have to be understood and respected. To be able to achieve this, knowledge of cultural heritage is a sine qua non. Without such knowledge there would continue to be misunderstanding, confusion, disrespect of people from other cultures whether within a country or internationally. Therefore, the introduction of GSP in tertiary institutions in Nigeria promotes cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, and cultural tolerance. This helps in safeguarding these heritages in different localities in Nigeria. For Iloeje (2017), the General Studies

courses expose students to greater awareness about other disciplines of study with a view to making them understand and contribute more meaningfully to other spheres of nation building, and become better members of the society in the long run.

Nwosu (2017) notes that in tertiary education, general education/studies provides an interdisciplinary environment that allows students to understand and integrate the liberal arts and sciences. The Federal Government of Nigeria adopts GSP in order to make students to have a holistic academic training since a narrow-based education cannot help the students in the universities to have a good direction. GSP through the Humanities Unit makes students to learn cultures that are different from their background. The Programme offers learning opportunities on student's life and experiences. This is the reason: the National Universities Commission (NUC) designed the General Studies programme in order to provide an intellectual horizon of students with broad-based oriented and self-reliant education. It bestows students with the necessary potentialities for effective and functional citizenship. GSP helps students to be competent intellectuals.

The paper looked at the vital concepts, the importance of Cultural Heritage (CH), brief literature review, Origin of General Studies Programme in Nigeria, Humanities Unit X-rayed,

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discussion and then, conclusion. The paper highlights the role of General Studies Programme in understanding cultural heritage and the need for preservation. This study hopes to establish that exposing the students to the understanding of cultural heritage will help to create cultural sensitivity in their minds which in turn will aid culture preservation.

Conceptual Clarification

In this section, the concept of culture, heritage, cultural heritage and preservation are discussed.

Culture

An anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in his "Primitive Culture" (1871) states,

. Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The concept of 'culture' denotes a lot of meanings, but we can understand it to mean social organization, custom and tradition, religion, language, art and literature, form of government, economic system (Cited in Jafar, 2017, p711-710).

Buckland (2015) notes that there are two important points here: First, "culture" includes all aspects of belief and behavior; and, second, it is learned through social interaction, often unconsciously. It is not genetically inherited. He maintains that culture, hence cultural heritage, is essentially active. It is performed through living, as is implied by Tylor's definition. Hence, if particular ethnic traditions are to be maintained, there has to be continuing active engagement. Culture includes the ideas, value, customs and artifacts of a group of people (Schaefer, 2002).

Heritage

Heritage is a proper and legally held possession which comes from the circumstances of birth and transmitted from ancestors. Heritage is also an essential element that makes it possible for a people to show its uniqueness, to manifest its own way of perceiving the world and to express its capacity for cultural creativity (Barillet, Joffroy, & Longuet, 2006).

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage offers an idea about recognising and appreciating culture (Johannes, 2018, p 57). Cultural heritages are therefore the sum total of material/tangible and non-material/intangible cultures of a particular society transmitted across generations (Ogundele, 2000, p. 12). Tangible cultural heritage includes man's physical indigenous products which can be touched and seen such as architecture/buildings, defensive walls and ditches, crafts, tools, ivory, cowries, art works, iron furnaces, wooden objects, tombs and grave goods, temples, dresses, pottery and potsherd pavements, monuments, books, and works of art, among other artifacts (Ogundele, 2014, p.5). On the other hand, non-material or ideological cultural heritages include all intangible and invisible aspects of a people's ways of life such as ideas, folklore, kinship, norms, values, worldviews, philosophies of life, religious beliefs and practices, music, dance, festivals, traditions, language, and knowledge among others (Nnonyelu, 2009; Ogundele, 2000). Cultural heritage is important because it strongly influences our sense of identity, our loyalties, and our behavior (Buckland, 2015). Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time (Faro, 2006 in Dümcke & Gnedovsky, 2013).

Preservation

Preservation is the specific actions taken to prolong the useful life of individual objects or entire collections within a particular institution (Cloonan, 2004). Preservation is the maintenance of artifact in its current physical condition (Adeniran & Akinlabi, 2011). Eluyemi (2002, p.2) sees preservation as "the promotion of cultural property whether of concrete or non-concrete nature, past or present, written or unwritten/oral. Value has always been the underlying reason for heritage preservation. Naturally, society does not make effort to conserve something that it does not value. Humankind encourages the protection and preservation of cultural heritage, as it embodies important aspects of history (Olga Lvova, 2013).

Why Cultural Heritage Needs More Attention in Nigeria?

Nigeria is a heterogeneous country comprising many nationalities with varying cultures. The importance of cultural heritage in Nigeria cannot be overestimated. Adedimeji (2009) in Ola and Adegboro (2015) identified distinct values of cultural heritage in any society as follows: culture functions as lenses of perception which reflects how people see themselves and see their environment; culture acts as a spring of motivation; cultural heritage serves as a standard of judgment especially when deciding what is acceptable as good or bad in a particular culture. In African culture, honour and respect are conferred on the elderly and their words are automatically associated with wisdom and experience in most Nigeria cultural practices. Culture also functions as the basis for stratification; culture is valuable for serving the important role as a means of communication. It produces language and it is advanced by it; culture defines production and consumption attitude of people. The Igbo tribe in Nigeria is noted for their daring entrepreneurship traits. To be removed from one's culture is to be deprived of one's identity.

Nigeria culture plays an important role in the lives of separate individuals and the society as whole. Culture helps to accumulate, control and organise the human experience. It is basically what makes a person human. A person's immersion in a culture is determined by his/her socialization, familiarity with cultural heritage, as well as the development of his individual abilities. All these are usually achieved in the process of upbringing and education. Cultural conflicts can arise within large communities as a result of cultural differences in Nigeria. To prevent this, it is important to control the formation of cultural values in a society.

Cultural heritage of Nigeria is unique and holds our integrity as a people. It is an identity that can be introduced to the world. It affirms our identity as a people because it creates a comprehensive framework for the preservation of cultural heritage including cultural sites, old buildings, monuments, shrines, and landmarks that have cultural significance and historical value.

Since Nigeria is multicultural in nature, understanding cultural heritage is a viable instrument for cohesion. The ability to live well

with others in multicultural society depends on how knowledgeable a person is on cultural heritage. What you know is the strength you use. Ignorance of other cultures often leads to violence and even xenophobic attitude. However, cultural intolerance is often the outcome of lack of knowledge of other cultures. A person will be myopic in knowledge if he lacks knowledge of other people's values and norms inherent in their cultures. Cultural heritages are known as one of the most important backing and identity of the culture of a society while their conservation is a critical domain.

Preserving CH is very vital because of its capacity to promote the past ways of life that are useful to contemporary societies. For instance an archaeological site tells us the life ways of extinct people which help to form the extant society. The past is essentially the key to the present and platform into the future. The cultural significance of heritage items qualifies them for conservation. Such conservation or preservation should serve multi-purpose goals embodied in tourism (Adeniran & Akinlabi, 2011). However, the tourism industry uses cultural heritage as support for its backbone activities like hotel accommodation, transport and catering. Cultural heritage is used as the attraction that gets visitors to come. Cultural sites are used for leisure and outdoor activities, and as arenas for a diversity of events and spectacles.

Modernization, inevitable in every society, should not overshadow the importance of cultural heritage as a vector of development and social stability, both for present and future generations. In order to preserve this legacy from the past, National and local communities are encouraged to protect and valorise this heritage that represents the core of their common identity (Barille, Joffroy, & Longu, 2006). The NUC initiated GSP to bring cultural awakening and awareness to students in order to melt down the harm done by colonization and westernization. This shows the importance of studying cultural heritage and the need for its preservation.

Review of Literature

General Studies

The General Studies is a programme designed to provide an intellectual meeting point for all disciplines, and expand the intellectual horizon of

students (Iloeje, 2017, p.2). The General Studies courses are meant to expose students to greater awareness about other disciplines of study with a view to making them perform better in their chosen fields of study, understand and contribute more meaningfully to other spheres of nation building and become better members of the society in the long run (Iloeje, 2017, p.2). The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2007) summarized the goals of the General Studies Programme (GSP) to include production of well rounded, morally and intellectually capable graduates with vision and entrepreneurial skills in an environment of peace and social cohesiveness.

Opata (2017) notes that the overall goal of the GSP in any African University should be to produce culturally and ideologically literate nationalities who, in whatever condition they find themselves after graduation, would be able to see through the veil of imperialism and globalization, and who therefore will be in a position to evolve policies that could help make Africa more authentic and independent. He commends humanities unit in playing an encouraging role by educating students about their rich and diverse cultural heritage.

Cultural Heritage and Preservation

Nigeria is a heterogeneous country comprising many nationalities with varying cultures. According to Adedimeji (2009), each culture represents the people's ways of life, norms, values, mores, ethos, ethics, and etiquettes and complete worldview. He, however, posited that the peculiar Nigerian cultural values are being eroded by the pop culture brought by globalization. Aremu (2008) identifies festivals in different states as most memorable cultural destinations in Nigeria today. These include: Annual Argungu festivals in Kebbi State, Annual Sallah Durbar in Katsina State and others. Nigerian societies are known for their unique new yam festivals celebrated in almost all communities. Other Nigerian cultural heritages were the blacksmithing industry, brass-casting, bronze works and metal-working industries practiced across Nigeria, terracotta, wood carvers constructed beautiful stools and doors, engravings on walls and rocks, etc. All these skills which served as good entrepreneurial and income yielding jobs have been abandoned for foreign ones in the quest

for civilization. It is also evident that this local industry created an avenue for employment and entrepreneurship beginning from the miners, to blacksmiths, distributors and even to users of products from the blacksmithing industry (Anigbogu & Onyima, 2013). It is important to note that cultural heritage preservation has not yet become firmly rooted in the Nigerian consciousness as other matters such as sports, particularly soccer (Zaid, Abioye, & Olatise, 2012).

In spite of the potential of these Nigeria cultural heritages, Onyima (2016, p.287) asserts that they are faced with a lot of challenges such as the influence of modernization, Christianity, commerce, civilization, change, development, looting, and antiquarians, among others. Apart from smuggling, theft, vandalism and looting of museums, another most threatening challenge facing Nigerian cultural heritage is religious dogmatism and iconoclasm. It is however pertinent to stress that most of these Nigerian cultural heritages are threatened due to faulty efforts at preserving and conserving them (Mathias & David, 2014). There is therefore the need for a conscious preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages, while negative ones should be discarded.

The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) that has the responsibility for the preservation and discovery of heritage sites is handicapped due to low subventions and funding from government to carry out their statutory responsibilities (Onyima, 2016, p.287). According to New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage Value (2010), the purpose of conservation is to care for places of cultural heritage value. In general, such places have lasting values and can be appreciated in their own right, inform us about the past and the cultures of those who came before us, provide tangible evidence of the continuity between past, present, and future, underpin and reinforce community identity and relationships to ancestors and the land and provide a measure against which the achievements of the present can be compared. It is the purpose of conservation to retain and reveal such values, and to support the ongoing meanings and functions of places of cultural heritage value, in the interests of present and future generations (Ola & Adegboye, 2015). A society is only civilized to the

degree that it protects the products of previous civilizations of the land it inhabits and provides these products with conditions to re-live (Tapan, 2014).

Functionalist theory is suitable for the study.

Functionalists view society as a system in which all parts work—or function—together to create society as a whole. In this way, societies need culture to exist. Cultural norms function to support the fluid operation of society, and cultural values guide people in making choices. Just as members of a society work together to fulfill a society's needs, culture exists to meet its members' basic needs (Lumen Sociology, 2020). Functionalists also study culture in terms of values. Education is an important concept in the world because it is valued just as culture is. The need to preserve Nigerian cultural heritage is best explained through the functionalist perspective. Functionalists emphasize that society consists of inter related parts which work for the integration and stability of the whole system. Preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages is capable of promoting collective consciousness in terms of unity, oneness, nationalism and fostering peaceful co-existence among Nigerians.

Origin of General Studies Programme in Nigeria

General Studies Programme in UNN was established by the University of Nigeria Law in 1960 (E.N.L. N0 21 of 1961, statute 6) (Anyadike, 2013). The original curriculum for the General Studies Programme was developed by a combined team of British and American experts namely John Blake of the University of Keele and Edward Carlin of Michigan State University, USA (University of Nigeria, School of General Studies Undergraduate Academic Handbook: 77). The programme was made compulsory in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria by the directives of General Olusegun Obasanjo, then Head of State, on October 22, 1977

(Anyadike, 2013). General Studies Programme is based on the philosophy of providing intellectual knowledge and training that equips students to understand the complex dynamics of modern society, so that graduates from any discipline can function affectively in all fields, irrespective of his or her area of specialization, and be able to contribute robustly to any aspect of nation building. The General Studies Programme was launched in 1961/62 session, which marked a significant development in university education in Nigeria.

The aim of GSP is to acquaint all the students with the methodologies and techniques for an understanding of Nigeria's heritage and the social and scientific aspects of the world today (Handbook, p.6). General Studies Programme exposes student to the right knowledge, skills and values outside their respective fields of specialization making them to function sustainably in the society. It was expected that every undergraduate student take four of the general studies courses which are outside his/her chosen discipline. Thus, it is a prerequisite for obtaining the University of Nigeria's certificate for first degree and diplomas.

Table 1 shows the courses under General Studies Programme guideline as obtained in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka approved by National Universities Commission (NUC). The table shows that the curriculum cuts across all the faculties in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The academic staff came from Physical and Biological Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Liberal Arts.

Thousands of students register GSP every academic session. This is an avenue where students interact with and understand the cultural heritage of various peoples in Nigeria. The understanding of cultural heritage through the programme educates the mind and character of students.

Table 1: GSP Courses in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Approved by National Universities Commission

S/N	Course Code	Course Title and Content	Students That Offer It
1	GSP 101	Use of English 1 Study Skills and Basic Research Methods	Compulsory for all the Students in all Faculties
2	GSP 102	Use of English 11 Basic Grammar and Varieties of Writing	Compulsory for all the Students in all Faculties
3	GSP 111	Use of Library and Basic Research Skills	Compulsory for all the Students in all Faculties
4	GSP 105	Natural Sciences 1 Introduction to Natural Sciences 1	Compulsory for all Students in the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences, Law, and Education
5	GSP 106	Introduction to Natural Sciences 11	Compulsory for all Students in the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences, Law, and Education
6	GSP 201	The Social Sciences	Compulsory for all Students in all Faculties
7	GSP 202	Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies	Compulsory for all Students in all Faculties
8	GSP 207	Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence and Igbo Linguistics	Compulsory for all Students (except Faculty of Arts Students, though with the exception of Mass Communication)
9	GSP 208	Nigerian Peoples and Cultures and Igbo Linguistics	Compulsory for all Students (except Faculty of Arts Students, though with the exception of Mass Communication)

Humanities Unit as one of the units in General Studies Programme in UNN

Humanities Unit is one of the units in the School of General Studies Programme, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Humanities Unit has cultural heritage specification in their contents. Two courses were under Humanities Unit; these are Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence (GSP 207) and Nigerian Peoples and Cultures (GSP 208). In 2016, Igbo Linguistics was introduced, which is under the two courses. Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence are taught in the first semester and Nigerian Peoples and Cultures is for second semester.

Nigerian Peoples and Cultures as a course comprises the study of Nigerian history, culture and arts in pre-colonial times, Nigerian's perception of his world, Culture areas of Nigeria and their characteristics, Evolution of Nigeria as a political unit, Indigene/settler phenomenon, Concepts of trade, Economics of self-reliance, Social justice, Individual and national development, Norms and values, Negative attributes and conducts (cultism and related vices), Re-orientation of moral and national values, Moral obligations of citizens, and Environmental problems as its course content. The Lecturers through the coordinator of Humanities Unit prepare teaching topics from the course

content in order to have a resource material in form of textbook for the students. The objective of the unit is to make the students to come terms with topical issues in contemporary Nigeria, improve the critical minds of the students and enhance public speech capacity of the students (School of General Studies Undergraduate Academic Handbook).

Humanities unit lecturers teach the students using an interactive approach. These are general lecture, seminar class, term paper writing and class test. General lecture is for all departments offering Humanities Unit as their elective. It holds every Monday morning at Nsukka and Thursday morning in Enugu campus. Lecturers were assigned to topics they teach in general classes according to their area of specialization. At the same time departments were shared among the Lecturers for seminar classes, on which a particular day is fixed by the help of class representatives. The Lecturers share topics to the students, which they present in turns in the class. Lecturers were assigned to different departments for effective understanding of the course.

All the faculties in UNN offer Humanities courses, except Faculty of Arts with mass communication exclusive (see table 1). In Nigerian Peoples and Cultures (GSP 208), students are required to write a topic from their cultural

background. For instance a term paper topic may typically be thus: "The Role of Heritage Sites in National Development in Your Area". The student is expected to look at the cultural heritage (be it the tangible or intangible) from their area. This ensures that the students understand their cultural heritage better. They defend the term paper write up like undergraduate project defence on the day of submission. This creates an avenue for students to learn from one another. In the selection of the term paper topics, some students find it difficult to go for the field work because they have not travelled to their town since they were born, and even some that have travelled are often confined in their house. This makes them not to be acquainted with their cultural heritage. One of the students from science education said that he did not know the route to their town. Their life basically revolves around the city where their parents reside. The teaching of GSP creates cultural awareness by sensitizing the need for preserving of our cultural heritage which represents our identity. The main aim of Nigerian Peoples and Cultures (GSP 208) is to bring an understanding of cultural heritage and the need for its preservation to the new generation.

Discussion

General Studies Programme in Understanding Cultural Heritage and Need for Preservation

The value attached to cultural heritage brings about the need for its preservation. This is one of the reasons why NUC made GSP a compulsory course in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Obiwulu (2017) notes that "one who is ignorant of other cultures especially those in his country is very likely to define and categorize values only from his own culture milieu". He maintains that such an individual does not know about other values and norms inherent in other cultures and societies. The person's worldview is quite narrow, limited and myopic. GSP through Nigerian Peoples and Cultures in Humanities Unit introduces students to cultural heritage studies. This makes students to have knowledge of their cultures and the cultures of various peoples in Nigeria.

Table 1 show that thousands of students offer General Studies Programme. These students interact with each other in class, thereby establishing intercultural understanding among

themselves. The seminar and term paper topics are derived by the students from their cultural area, which forces students to be acquainted with the place of their origin. During seminar presentations and term paper defence, students are permitted to ask questions and make contributions. These exercises throw more light on the topic presented and the term paper defence is an opportunity for students to gain knowledge about other people's cultures. These help students to avoid cultural isolation and ignorance. It is worrisome that heritage sites abound in different communities in Nigeria, yet some people from the area are still not aware of their existence. During a seminar class, students were asked to list heritage sites they had visited in their area. Some of the students answered that they had not travelled to their home town for a long time. Some said that they did not know what heritage sites were. This shows that a majority of Nigerian people does not know the cultural heritage inherent in their area. This is in line with the study by EENC Paper (2013) "**A Study of Awareness of Cultural Heritage; Sivas Sample**". During the focused group discussion, students were asked whether they or the people around them were aware of their cultural heritage. The results of the qualitative study found that both the students from Sivas and the others have little or no awareness of cultural heritage. This illustrated scenario finds a parallel in the Nigerian situation where our cultural heritage is being relegated to the background due to westernization and ignorance.

Cultural values and morals like respect to elders/constituted authority, honesty, justice, loyalty and patriotism have vanished in Nigeria. The GSP has made it possible to inculcate the knowledge of cultural heritage to the students. Due to variation in cultures, there are students that are not ready to work or interact with students other than those from their cultures. GSP have succeeded in unveiling the similarities inherent in cultures. Students that passed through GSP courses particularly those of the Humanities Unit are open minded in their interaction with their fellow students and society as well.

Awareness creation is a significant component in the protection of cultural heritage. This is what GSP is doing. Cultural heritages are on the risk of being extinct when there is lack of enough

consciousness on them. When there is no sufficient awareness for cultural assets, these assets could not be protected and are damaged. It is believed that by instituting a compulsory course on culture and history of various peoples, the widespread ignorance among Nigerian groups about one another and about themselves will be remedied.

Nigeria stands to benefit a lot if her cultural heritages are adequately preserved. It has great potential of boosting the country's economy through tourism. When cultural heritages are properly preserved and advertized through the print and electronic media, they stand a chance of attracting tourists from the nooks and crannies of the world. This would be a plus to national revenue and GDP, which will in turn provide more funds for the development of the country (Onyima, 2016, p.288). Okwor (2010, p.7) notes that the award of degrees will be made conditional upon the passing of the paper in this course.

Conclusion

Students are leaders of tomorrow; therefore exposing them to their cultural heritage through the teaching of GSP is one of the ways of preserving these heritages. We need to understand what we are preserving and the benefits of preservation, before we can be advocates. GSP helps to empower students to recognize the significance of historic resources, to preserve them for future generations, and to integrate them into everyday life through lifelong learning, and community conversations. All tertiary institutions should follow strictly the guidelines of the NUC on Nigerian Peoples and Cultures. Today, it is essential for students to better know and understand the richness and variety present within African cultural heritage through the GSP programme. This fosters cultural awareness and tolerance among the students from different ethnic groups.

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