

Contributions of Interdisciplinary Approach to the Development of History and Historiography in Nigeria

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Abstract

In time past, Nigerian and African societies were regarded as unrewarding gyrations of barbarous and backward tribes in picturesque but irrelevant part of the globe. Pertinent to know that European scholars and writers like Frederick Hegel, A.P. Newton, Hugh Trevor Roper, Margery Perham, Herbert Spencer among others regarded Africa as having no history and that it is not possible to write a history of Africa. To these Eurocentric and prejudiced scholars, the only history of Africa worthy of mention and serious study was the history of alien activities in Africa. As A.P. Newton and other Eurocentric colleagues of his had asserted, 'History only begins when man take to writing, concerning almost entirely with written records and can only make use of material remains with which the archaeologists and anthropologists are concerned'. Thus, one of the causes of the disinterest in African history particularly Nigeria History emanates from its historiography and accessing the sources of information concerning the pre-literate society and past events of Nigeria and her other African societies. Against this background, the work examines and set to evaluate the contributions of interdisciplinary approach to the study of Nigerian history and historiography. The paper will clearly depict if the interdisciplinary approach can help give satisfactory solutions to historical problems. Again, it examines how interdisciplinary approach can aid Nigerian historiography to achieve reliability and make its conclusion tenable and acceptable to scholars and laymen.

Keywords: *Historiography, Interdisciplinary Approach, Contributions, Improvement*

Introduction

The interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach in history refers to the efforts of historians to use the knowledge of discipline outside history for their interpretations. Historians now use the findings of other disciplines like Archaeology, Linguistics, Anthropology, Ethnography, Economics, Psychology, Paleontology, and the like in their efforts to promote a better understanding and development of Nigerian and African historiography. Pertinent to know is that no single discipline is capable of throwing all the much needed light on better understanding and mastery of the environment in its entirety. The discipline of history is gradually coming out of its shell and cooperating with other disciplines. The days are far gone when ‘traditional’ historians preached the sanctity of the disciplines and exhorted that it should not be ‘adulterated’ by other disciplines.

The old belief was that history would automatically lose its identity as an independent discipline; that it would become dependent, and that it might even become a dumping ground for the hypotheses and theories of other related disciplines like the social science. Recent developments in the intellectual world have however proved the above wrong. There is today a gradual move towards cooperation among related fields or disciplines, especially in the Humanities. Today, conferences and research projects are packaged in ways that scholars from different disciplines contribute their own perspectives on a given theme thus producing a comprehensive result which no single discipline could have been able to fathom. According to Adeboye, “this type of cooperation has given a vigorous fillip to research and has as well expanded the frontiers of knowledge” (3)

The interdisciplinary approach is seen from two perspectives. First, there is a sense in which experts from different but related disciplines could collaborate in a joint research effort. The second sense in which one could talk of an interdisciplinary approach is when an historian utilizes the findings, insights, theories, hypotheses and other analytical tools generated by scholars from other disciplines to aid his own historical reconstruction and interpretation (Adeboye 6). The paper examines the contributions of interdisciplinary approach to the development of history and historiography in Nigeria. It further examines the fact that the study of history has gone far beyond the creation and recreation of history to glorify certain institutions and individuals. Also, that the powerful arm of interdisciplinary approach to historical study and writing is the surest way to assist Nigerian and African historiography to achieve reliability in its findings or to make its conclusions tenable and acceptable.

Nigerian/African History

History may be defined as the study of man through the evidence of his past action (Tarikh 12). This is to say the activities of man as he interacts with man and his environment in the process of production of material life leading to change. The new trends in African history and research can only be properly appreciated when they are seen in the wider context of the development of historical practices in Africa since the end of the Second World War in 1945 (Ajayi and Alagoa “Black Africa” 41-45). Of greater significance for the future development of African historical studies is that from the mid-1950s, under the influence of African historians such as K.O. Dike,

S.O. Biobaku and J.F.A. Ajayi, speculate hypothesis based on slender evidence which has increasingly given way to scientific enquiry (Ajayi and Dike 394-400). The paper does not intend to present any justification for the study of African history rather let some definitions of history and the explanations which are essential to the understanding of the definitions be applied to enable the audience appreciate what African history is all about. Imperative to note that what is being pointed out is elaborating on the fundamental justification for the study of history. In fact, that justification is that man must know his past, and so he must know the infinite richness and variety in the art and science as well as the social organization and politics of his past.

The term 'history' as E.H. Carr puts it, "is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past" (11). The implication of this definition is the tendency to see the past in the light of the pre-occupations and prejudices of the present. That is, each age tries to form its own conception of the past. Some historians believe that each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions prevalent in its own time. In his book, 'The Nature of History', Arthur Marwick states that history has three levels of meaning. First, it connotes the entire human past as it actually happened. Second, history connotes man's attempt to describe and interpret that past. The third meaning is the study of history as a discipline. This three-fold usage of the word 'history' seems to be the subject matter of history, but the most regular notion of the subject is the description and interpretation of the past (119-122). Imperative to know is that when historians speak of the history of Africa, they are really talking about the description and interpretation of the African past (Carr 111). In other words it is the construction of the past from documents, written and unwritten, which are critically analyzed and interpreted.

In writing African history, the historian deals with documents of the past, written and unwritten. These are traces of the past human activities which he deals with, for, he cannot deal with the past directly. For example, as regards the past history and achievements of the Benin Kingdom, researchers have used a new historical technique involving archaeology, oral traditions and material artifacts to piece together the history of the great kingdom of Benin. Succinct to know that the events of the past have disappeared and what exists about the past are statements and records which the historian interacts with. Many techniques and disciplines have been enlisted in the search to recover the history of Africa: archaeology, comparative linguistics, and even such obscure subjects as ethno-botany. But the professional African historian and non-African, who were now available for the task, were now more interested in historical records. One of the most significant results of their work of the last fifty years has been the appreciation of the value of oral records (Henige 32).

However, 'the whole mode and manner of looking at things alters with every age', this does not mean that the real events of a given age change; it means that man's understanding of these facts changes. This may be interpreted to connote that there is a subjective element in the historian's task. This explains why the history of any event may not be the same to two historians. Of course, historians differ in their personalities and some could be more detached than the others. More importantly, the extent of the knowledge of the historian may determine what he writes. It is not wise to think that the historian can write anything and call it history. In history, the research it entails has its own rules and procedures which historians call historical method, and these have

to be learned. When historians speak of critical analysis and interpretation, this implies that history is not just story-telling or a mere chronicle.

What is Historiography?

Historiography deals with the description and interpretations of the past important events. It critically examines history as a discipline and the systematic study of the subject and the problems involved in the study of the writing of history (Fadeiye 63). Historiography is again defined as the study of the writing of history, or it can be taken to mean the craft of writing history. The two aspects of studying historiography are: first, the theories and philosophies of history, both in the sense of abstract and the past; and second what historians write, which is the methodological aspect. So, historiography is not concerned with trying to establish what happened and how it happened but concerned with the kind of history that has been written about events. Since one is dealing with the writers of history, one is asking the reasons why they portrayed the events of the past in the way they did. One's attention should also be attracted to the prejudices behind the writing of their various histories, and the interpretation of events.

Afigbo, asserts that the word 'historiography' which now has its own history and which is at times described simply as the art of writing history, is used to refer to four different but closely related kinds of historical activities (45). The first is the discovery and critical analysis of historical sources; the second, is the reconstruction and description of the past on the basis of facts quarried from the discovered sources; third, the facts, of some general theory which gives meaning and inner logic to the known past, or to most of it, as well as serves "to educate and ascertain society as a whole", or even helps to influence aspects of contemporary public policy or action; and the fourth is the reflection on the trends and patterns of historical writing (49). He again asserts that "the general run of historians in most societies contribute to the development of historiography only though ascertaining the facts of the past and using these to construct the past or what they think is the past" (65).

The study of historiography, therefore, is a major concern with its development and specifically its attempts to establish knowledge of past events (Alagoa "Towards a History" 21). This paper is partly concerned with the complex problems involved in the study of and nature of history. Given this basic presupposition, historiography is a reflection on history as a discipline and the problems involved in the writing of history. History, as seen varies as the life and spirit of different ages vary, and that is why at different times and in different countries, diverse types of history have prevailed. The task of the historians is to reconstruct a past they have never known and, which they can neither deduce from first principles nor create by an act of the imagination. In doing this, they reveal their diverse presuppositions, concerns and ambitions. The study of the New African historiography will show that historians have written in a variety of genres (Fadeiye 63). However, the art of history, the manner of combining individual facts into a truthful and persuasive whole, involves so much that is individual as well as time-bound, that the writing of history must always be changing and varying (Adeniran and Adekunle 32-35).

It was already pointed out that the first aspect of historiography deals with theories and philosophies of history. The first part of this aspect includes the purpose of history, that is, the world view of the essence of human existence. The second part concerns the profession of history, that is, the writing of history. The questions which arise from the writing of history are: How can historians know what happened in the past? What do historians mean when they say they are

explaining? These are questions on the problems of knowledge and explanation in history. The methodological aspect of historiography concerns the application of the facts and methodology of the historian. In this case, the work is concerned with the capability of the historian especially how he conducts his research, and the rules he has to abide with in order to be able to explain events.

Having explained the meaning of historiography and the two aspects of its study, it is pertinent to now discuss the New African historiography. The stimulus to undertake a New African historiography came with the movement towards independence which gathered pace in Africa during and after the Second World War. It was an aspect of the intellectual and ideological response of Africans to colonialism which rejected European interpretations of the African past (Barracrough 41). It demanded a new orientation and improved educational facilities to produce this re-interpretation. This determined the character of the New African historiography in terms of what it rejected and what it accepted; what it has been concerned with and what it has tended to neglect and so on (Dike and Ajayi 397).

Dike's work, "Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885, published in 1956" marked in some ways a watershed (61). Whereas European historians had viewed African history from outside, writing either of Europeans in Africa or of their impact on African society, Dike changed the focus from the Europeans to the Africans themselves, bringing out the identity in spite of four centuries of European contact, and the European traders, and insisting that the only valid history must be a history of Africans (66). The outcome of this new trend was the emergence in the 1950s of the New African historiography. Africans research students insisted that African history must be the history of Africans and not of Europeans in Africa. They also insisted that local records and historical traditions must be used to supplement European metropolitan archives. In other words, tradition must be accepted as valid material for historical research (72).

The validity of non-written sources for historical research has been promoted via interdisciplinary approach. Dike and Ajayi assert that, there have been three major developments to promote this interdisciplinary approach. The first has been the creation of special centers or institutes of African studies within which historians, anthropologists, linguists, and archaeologists can cooperate, both in research and in the training of historians. The second consists of specific culture – history projects like the Benin and Yoruba Historical Research Centers, in which teams of people from different disciplines cooperate under the direction of one person to throw light on the culture history of a particular people. The third is the formation of associations and the convening of periodic conferences or congresses on African history or African studies in general, bringing experts together from many disciplines to review progress in different fields and bring their joint considerations to bear on specific problems of African history (87-89).

So far, the new historical tradition which evolved in the 1950s has led to the discovery and authentication of the sources of African history (Alagoa "Towards a History" 24). It has also led to the establishment of the fact that there is a valid African past. What is emphasized here is that the new African historiography has been able to establish the sources of African history and the techniques for dealing with them. It has drawn the attention of the world to the wealth of Arabic records and local *tarikhs* whose existence tended to be ignored in the past or at last whose importance was clearly underestimated. But beyond that, says Afigbo, "it has insisted on and given respectability to other kinds of sources which conventional western historians had either completely ignores or at least frowned upon" (67-68). This kind of sources is oral tradition,

ethnography, archaeology, palaeo-botany and palaeo-zoology, linguists, etc. as valid sources of historical evidence for the reconstruction of the African past (Butterfield 51).

Problems Facing Nigerian/African Historiography

Nigerian historiography like the rest of the continent faces various challenges and problems. However, these problems are no longer serious ones as Nigerian historians and other scholars have put forward different convincing and authentic arguments to uphold and justify the legitimate existence of Nigerian historiography. One of the major problems confronting Nigerian /African historiography is the notorious view held by many European historians and other scholars and writers that Africa lay in an unhistoric part of the world. The remarks of Harry Johnston, a great British empire builder, Endre Sik, Wilhelm Frederick Hegel and Trevor Roper among others bear evidence of this prejudiced view of the African past. For instance, Harry Johnston once remarked that, "Tribal Africans were barbarous people who had never advanced beyond the first steps of civilizations" (Fadeiye 76).

In Johnston's view, the major interest of African history centered on the accomplishment of alien invaders of the 'Dark Continent'. It was also the view of Endre Sik, a Hungarian Marxist that: ...the colonial peoples of Africa led a primitive life, that some were sunk in the lowest stage of barbarism and that "scientific" history in Africa primarily revolves around the expansion...on to the soil of Africa (Fadeiye 77). Wilhelm Frederick Hegel, who later influenced Trevor Roper's thinking, also had the prejudiced and biased view of African historiography⁶ when he said: ...the history of the world travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning, Africa being no historical part of the globe; it has no movement or development to exhibit.

The major preoccupation of Nigerian/African historiography in the 1950s and 1960s as Ajayi and Alagoa had rightly pointed out, was to show beyond all reasonable doubts that Nigeria/Africa has a distinct history and interesting cultural beliefs of her own which was beyond the actions of the colonial governments and African reactions to them and that Africa has a past worthy of historical writing. As the two eminent Nigerian scholars had remarked: This (reaction of African historians) produced a historiography focused on the civilizations, empires and kingdoms of the Nile Valley, Zimbabwe, the West African Sudan (Ghana, Mali, and Songhai), the Guinea coast and the Congo Basin, the East African lake region and others (Ajayi and Alagoa 43).

African historians have thus shown beyond all reasonable doubts that Africa has her own distinct history and that the continent belongs to the historic world.

Another problem concerns the use of oral sources (oral traditions, oral evidence and archaeological discoveries) in the reconstruction of the Nigerian past. It is a known fact that Nigeria and the rest of the continent has no writing culture and that it is only in few areas in Africa particularly in northern and eastern parts of Africa where the Arabs had settled and introduced Islam, that the people have documentary historical records prior the advent of the Europeans. In view of the shortage of written documents, oral sources therefore form the bulk of the sources from which the Nigerian and African past could be reconstructed. As Jan Vansina has indicated: Oral tradition can contain information about the past and it is in that capacity that historians should study it. This is obviously particularly true for historians of Africa to whom such sources (including

oral history) remain so critically important, both because of the paucity of other data and because of the need to hear the voice of Africans themselves (66-69).

European historians and scholars are nevertheless skeptical about the reliability of oral traditions and other unwritten sources for the reconstruction of the Nigerian and African past. Noting this problems, Ajayi and Alagoa remark:

This important objection challenged those concerned with the New African historiography to define their methodologies and demonstrate the validity of non written sources as evidence for historical study no less worthy of attention than written sources...African historians continue to wrestle with the many specific sources for historical reconstruction...(84).

It is however gratifying to note that this problem regarding the acceptance of oral sources as genuine and authentic sources for historical writing has been solved. The non-written sources like oral traditions, oral evidence, archaeological discoveries and other oral sources are now regarded as authentic for the reconstruction of Nigerian/African history. The remark of Ajayi and Alagoa testifies to this assertion:

...but African historians no longer have any cause to feel defensive about their use of oral traditions and other non-written sources. This particular aspect of African historiography can now be accepted as one of the ways in which the introduction of African history into the general body of academic disciplines had served to enrich world historiography (77).

Another problem confronting Nigerian/African historiography is the belief that historical changes in Africa are externally motivated. Many European scholars expressed various reservations about the emerging pattern of African history. Many of these foreign scholars had written a lot of academic jargons about African achievements because to them, such achievements were considered beyond the ability or capability of Africans. Such achievements, they argued in their writings, were derived from sources outside Africa. It was in their opinion that such remarkable achievements like the magnificent architectural monuments noticeable in Zimbabwe, Meroe and in other parts of Africa were introduced into Africa by peoples of non-African or non-black racial types. This point of view has been referred to as the Hamitic Hypothesis (Johnston 87).

It was the view (Eurocentric of course) of these European writers and scholars that African communities were essentially organized into extremely small-scale agricultural units which were forcibly conquered and civilized by outsiders thereby making them passive recipients of historical changes. In other words, they were incapable of shaping their historical destinies. Ajayi and Alagoa are particularly very critical of this biased view of the European writers and scholars when they wrote:

This point of view, usually called Hamitic Hypothesis, and the tendency to seek an external source and origin for high cultural, technological or political achievements of any major historical movement in the African past, is not yet completely absent from some recent accounts. However, this tradition too now represents a minority position very much on the defensive against the tide and sweep of African historiography (84).

Omer-Cooper also reacted to this erroneous view that changes in African historical growth were brought about by external influences. In his book titled 'Zulu Aftermath', he argued convincingly that the Mfecane which gave rise to the formation of the Zulu nation was African motivated and controlled. It also needed to be emphasized that African historiography was much

conditioned by the factor of illiteracy. Written records about African history were only created after contact with the outside world.

Interdisciplinary Approach: Conceptual Clarification

Interdisciplinary approach connotes the combining of two or more academic discipline into one activity. According to Heidi Jacob in Nnuriam, “Interdisciplinary approach is a knowledge, view and curriculum approach that consciously applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, topic, issue, problem or work...it involves researchers, students and teachers in the goals of connecting and integrating several academic school of thought and professions along with their specific perspectives in pursuit of a common task” (2). Klein and Newell offered a wide definition of interdisciplinary studies. According to them, it is a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession...it draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective (3).

The Relationship between History, Social and Natural Sciences

The purpose of history as conceived by historical school was essentially personal and individual. It enlarges the area of individual experience by teaching about human behavior about man in relation to other men, about the interaction of circumstances and conditions in their effects upon individual and social fortunes (Elton 47-48). It widens man’s perspective by opening man’s minds to the achievements of other ages and other people and also helps us to appreciate the limitations of man’s own view of the world.

According to Trevor Rope (49), it forces man to avoid parochialism. The study of history also teaches man to eschew simplified judgment because history also known that things are more complicated than they seem. History provides insights and a new level of wisdom for the individual which should help him to find his own values in a changing world. According to an American historian (Savelle) (Arthur 97), “if history had any didactic value at all, “it lies in the value of teaching men their own capabilities”. This is to say that there are useful lessons in history. Note that all science from physics to psychology is concerned with teaching men their capabilities. The real value of history as a social activity lies in the training it provides and the standard it sets (Barraclough 45). It could be argued that other sciences like physics and mathematics provide a far more rigorous training and set far more exacting standards of scientific precision, but that is not all that the historian has to offer; considerations such as these led to frustration and disillusionment. A small minority of historians were prepared to discard their inherited preconceptions because there was strong desire to maintain or restore continuity, to carry on where one had broken off. In the middle of the 20th century, Barraclough forecasted that a new generation of historians would come to maturity which not only sought to break with the past but ready to explore new methods and new lines of approach.

The paper is not concerned with the definition of history as a science but what the historian shares with the natural scientist in a joint enterprise for example, the attack upon the unknown. The difference between historians, history and natural sciences are that scientists work in the laboratories while historians work in the libraries, scientists produce short papers in collaboration with several other scientists while historians produce long papers and sometimes books and they seldom have collaborators. Professional historians spend much time in undergraduate teaching while professional scientists spend much time on their researcher with or without their graduate

students. There is however nothing in this to exaggerate the difference between the activities of the historian and those of the natural scientist because even the natural scientist deals in probabilities rather than in certainties (Barraclough 45).

The degree to which proof can be established of the various contentions that are made by scientists and historians is another striking difference between history and the natural sciences (John 89-91). While the scientists use empirical expertise to demonstrate the validity of any claim, having performed one experiment or another, historians do not carry out experiment, they interpret the facts or materials at their disposal to arrive at their conclusions (Fadeiye 55). From their sources of information, historians can probably say that something had happened in the way they say it did, however they cannot claim absolute perfection of what they say had happened (Okon 39). It should be stressed that when historians fail to establish conclusive proofs for their version of the past event, it does not mean that they are necessarily exposing themselves as thoroughly unscientific. In the same vein, the natural scientists also deal in probabilities, unlike when they claimed absolutism, as it happened in the 19th century.

While the natural scientist can repeat their experiments in the laboratories, historians cannot demand for a repeat performance of the past or past events. This brings in the issue of objectivity (Okon 41). The scientists can preserve objectivity towards the phenomena that they are studying. Historians can never be completely objective. This is because objectivity deals with two things – the subject and object. The historian is the subject and his materials or facts are the object. Objectivity could be regarded as accurate reporting, what is true or the measure of extent the subject has been able to use the object in its own essence without prejudice or bias (Hughes 44). The historian cannot be totally objective because historical facts are not empirical and therefore, there may be opportunity for disagreements among historians. Also, in the selection of facts, level of analysis and personal religious and ideological bias which may influence the reports of historians. This accounts for the reason why Geoffrey Barraclough proclaimed that there is no objective historical truth and that what we have is a series of accepted judgments (67). In their own assessment, E.H. Carr and G.M. Trevalyan tried to resolve the problem of historical objectivity by declaring that objectivity is a relative term.

While the historians make moral judgments, the natural scientists do not do this. By implication or by virtue of their selection of facts, historians cannot help but make judgments. Such judgments are not usually encountered in the natural sciences

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that instead of defending the autonomy of history or indeed of any field of study, it is important to realize that every science and discipline is dependent on other sciences or disciplines it draws its life from them and to them it owes a great part of its chances of progress. (Berkhofer 32-37) It is therefore not surprising that historians have seen much in the work of social scientists which reflect their own pre-occupations (Benson 28-29). History and social science share common aims, they share common roots and both of them claim to deal in principle with the whole range of social life, total situation at any given time. Their purpose is a comprehensive understanding of human actions and relationship. In turning to social sciences for new insights and new techniques, historians are only continuing a practice which has been followed at every turning point in the development and refinement of historical studies in the past (Barraclough 49). In general what historians discovered in the social science was a series of

concepts and a variety of new approaches to which they were willing to turn because of their uneasiness about their traditional methods (Braudel 31).

Contributions of Interdisciplinary Approach in the Advancement of Nigerian Historiography

The interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary approach in history refers to the efforts of historians to use the knowledge of disciplines outside history for their interpretations (Fadeiye 74). The study of the interdisciplinary approach allows the researchers and scholars to learn by making connections between ideas and concepts across different disciplines. Researchers and scholars learning in this way are able to apply the knowledge gained in one discipline to another different discipline as a way to deepen the learning experience. The most effective approach to interdisciplinary study enables students to build their own interdisciplinary pathway by choosing courses which make sense to them. For example, it is not too difficult to find a theme which crosses over disciplinary boundaries in literature, art and history or science and mathematics. Studying topics thematically is one way to bring ideas together resulting in more meaningful learning. This can occur by allowing researchers and scholars to choose their own subjects and their learning is deepened when they reflect on the connections between what they are learning in different disciplines.

Historians want to use the findings of other disciplines like archaeology, linguistics, anthropology, ethnography and the like in their efforts to promote a better understanding and development of Nigerian and African historiography. For instance, no single discipline is capable of throwing all the much needed light on better understanding and mastery of the environment in its entirety. In fact, historians always emphasize at their various conferences the need for active cooperation among scholars of the different disciplines for effective and meaningful reconstruction of the Nigerian past. According to Alagoa:

In some cases, practitioners of the disciplines specialize in the use of the sources for historical analysis. When this is not the case, historians have themselves to acquire sufficient knowledge of the methodology and principles of the other disciplines in order to use the data from them for historical purposes (“The Relationship between” 12-20).

Ethnography, for example, studies the customs of communities. It studies the political, social, economic and cultural institutions. Objects used for festivals, ceremonies and others used by masquerades constitute vital sources for the reconstruction of the past. Many historians have used ethnographic data to reconstruct Benin history. Vansina defines ethnographic data as “artifacts, customs, or beliefs held by groups which testify to their earlier usage in the past” (53). He further indicates that all ethnographic data share three characteristics in common. That they are timeless, the only time given being that of the ethnographic present; they are situational, testifying to, rather than giving evidence about, an event; they are practical having immediate functionality in the cultural terrain and therefore a certain level of genuineness (53).

Other disciplines like ethno-botany and ethno-zoology are also becoming of much significance for the reconstruction of Nigerian/African history. Ethno-botany and ethno-zoology dealing respectively with the domestication of plants and animals, comment significantly on the level of technology of a group, their economic activities as well as their interaction with other groups (Okon 51-52). From the above, it is obvious that historians of Nigeria, indeed of all traditional and post-traditional societies, ignore ethnographic data at their own peril. He further

asserts that one must be prepared to mobilize all possible resources for the study of any historical problem (52). The infusion of ethnographic data with significance beyond mere entertainment in these societies makes it imperative that these data be systematically collected and used by historians. Ethnographic data are certainly oral historical documents that historians can no longer afford to ignore.

Linguistic sources also throw more light on the languages spoken by people in a geographical area and the spread of such languages to other geographical areas. Light could therefore be thrown on words borrowed among diverse peoples. Alagoa throws light on the contribution of Linguistics to history:

The historical uses of linguistic classification are mostly clearly shown in the discussions of Bantu origins, migrations and spread from the Benue region through Central East and Southern Africa generated by the work of Greenberg (“Linguistic Evidence” 963). Greenberg also did a pioneer study on the interpretation of linguistic sources regarding the spread of literary and of Islamic political ideas of Borno to the Hausa States (Greenberg “Studies in African” 50) (“The Relationship between History” 12-20).

There are other disciplines which can help to throw more light on the past activities of man, which can equally assist the historian in his task of reconstructing the past. Such disciplines include Anthropology and the sciences – physical and social sciences. Throwing more light on interdisciplinary approach, Bassey W. Andah as cited in Alagoa asserts that:

...the traditional dichotomy between history and science does not hold, principally because historians rely on social science theories to interpret their data while social scientists in turn, use the findings of historians as a means of formulating and testing general theories (“The Relationship between History” 24).

The focal point here is to examine the contributions of these disciplines to Nigerian/African historiography, utilizing the concepts of the interdisciplinary approach.

One of the contributions of the interdisciplinary approach to African historiography is that it can assist Nigerian historiography in its attempt to achieve reliability in its findings or to make its conclusions tenable and acceptable. The interdisciplinary approach can therefore help to give satisfactory solutions to historical problems. The problems of chronology and dating have always stared the historian or historians in the face but archaeology and other sources are now shedding light on these problems. Although the areas excavated are still small and the results obtained so far available to historians are limited, there is no doubt however that archaeology with its progressive excavations will through the interdisciplinary approach make a meaningful impact on African historiography.

The interdisciplinary approach has been of immense help to historians in the task of reconstructing the Nigerian/African past. Historians are now using the insights from models and methodology of the social sciences in their task of improving Nigerian historiography. The techniques of the social sciences with particular reference to Anthropology, Linguistics and Archaeology, are now being used by historians and this will no doubt augur well for Nigerian historiography. Also, historians are now using the results of professionals like archaeologists, linguists and anthropologists in solving problems in different historical fields.

The interdisciplinary approach is yielding dividends which will be to the best interest of Nigerian historiography. Historians and archaeologists are now coming together the more and such

cooperation will no doubt result in each discipline being enriched the more and this will aid the growth of Nigerian historiography. Historians are now subscribing to professional archaeological journals like *Azania* and *African Journal of Archaeology* while their colleagues, the archaeologists are subscribing to historical journals like *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*; *Journal of African History* etc.

Today, many Nigerian universities, had established joint departments of history and International Relations, History and Archaeology, History and Political Science, History and Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, and further encouraged their students to take combined degrees in the two disciplines. Many historians are now interested in other disciplines like archaeology and linguistics and are working closely with their colleagues in those disciplines with a view to using the findings of their colleagues in their various historical researches. This is a good development, according to Fadeyiye, which will go a long way to improve Nigerian and African historiography (79).

Besides, historians and social scientists like archaeologists, linguists and anthropologists are now coming together to sponsor projects of interdisciplinary research. As Ajayi and Alagoa asserts:

In the earlier projects initiated by historians, such as the Benin Historical Research Scheme and the Yoruba Scheme, directed by the Nigerian scholars, Onwuka Dike and Saburi Biobaku respectively, the major field research roles were played by non-historians from outside ... historians take a more central part in the actual field activities, and their collaboration with other specialists has become more intimate ("Sub-Saharan Africa" 390-430).

It has now been abundantly realized by the practitioners of history especially that history cannot be studied in isolation except in collaborations with other related disciplines. History deals with the study of human actions which already passed and in order to have a clear knowledge of these past activities of man; it is of prime importance to employ the services of other disciplines. Besides, no discipline can be entirely independent and history is no exception. The remark of J.H. Robinson as cited in Fadeyiye asserts that "every discipline is dependent on other disciplines" (79) is very true indeed and this calls for interdisciplinary approach.

Conclusion

Interdisciplinary study allows for synthesis of ideas and the synthesis of characteristics from many disciplines. At the same time, it addresses researchers and scholars individual differences and help to develop important, transferable skills. These skills, such as critical thinking, communication and analysis are important and continually developing at all stages of life. The ivory towers are serving researchers and other academic scholars best if they enable and encourage them to build their own interdisciplinary pathway. This approach is sure to foster a love of learning, ignite a spark of enthusiasm and address learning differences for academic scholars.

Thus, the conclusion here is that historians need greater flexibility to be well equipped to approach problems. History has a lot to contribute to the understanding of other disciplines but like other academics, the historian is limited in the scope of his knowledge and he must draw upon the contributions of other scholars in other disciplines putting himself in a position to do so effectively by learning the language required and studying to benefit from the findings of their

practitioners. Thus, division into departments or faculties must not be seen as barriers but challenges.

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