GENERAL STUDIES PROGRAMME: AN INTELLECTUAL MEETING POINT
FOR ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Professor M. U. Iloeje
Rector, Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu

Abstract

In addressing the theme of this Conference, "THREE IN A BED: ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY", organized by the Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria; this Keynote Paper posits that the unique marriage of the above three bed-fellows has, at its intellectual meeting point and midwifed by a program of General Studies, given birth to an equally unique and quintessentially New Nigerian graduate citizen; a citizen empowered by a broad based education which has widened his intellectual horizon, endowing him with the necessary potentialities for effective and functional citizenship, and enabling him to function effectively in diverse fields, irrespective of his primary area of specialization. The origin, philosophy, goals and objectives of the General Studies programme were presented. The programme as it exists in some specific universities and polytechnics in Nigeria were examined to show the extent to which they adhere to the General Studies guidelines of the National Universities Commission and the National Board for Technical Education. The paper finally affirms that the DNA powering the birth of this quintessentially New Nigerian graduate citizen is the General Studies Programme. The programme therefore must be allowed to continue and flourish maximally in our Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Introduction

Background Information

Prior to 1960, before the setting up of the University of Nigeria, the only University in the country then, University College Ibadan, was a College of the University of London. This University College, along with other European Universities, adopted a single-track educational system where a student admitted to study one course, for example Religion, was taught only Religion throughout the duration of his/her studies without recourse to basic knowledge of what obtains in other academic disciplines. Such narrow education as noted in the International Bank Mission Report could not put Nigeria on the right direction for development (Ijomah, 1986). According to Azikiwe as noted in Ijomah (1986), what was dubbed the "colonial mentality" was only possible because the colonial education imprisoned the African intellectual potentialities and denied them avenues for meaningful expression.

The Ibadan experiment did not succeed in "decolonising" the minds of the then average Nigerian. As Iloeje (2004, pp.10-11) posits: "In colonial Nigeria, many Nigerians developed an uncritical attitude towards anything British and a derogatory attitude towards anything produced locally". As Iloeje (2004) further suggests, our people also needed to be liberated from their suspicions of the Ibadan University. The affiliation to London of the Ibadan University was viewed as a subtle avenue for the British colonial masters to continue to control the quantity and quality of university graduates produced in Nigeria and the nature of such education (Iloeje, 2004).

When the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas (now University Council for Higher Education Overseas) and the International Cooperation Administration (now the United States Agency for International Development) were invited for programme recommendation, both agreed and recommended that any Nigerian University should address itself to the problems of Nigeria and indeed of emergent nation. In other words, the solution to the nation's problems may lie in the introduction of a programme that, according to Ifiok (1980), as cited in Anyadike (2013, p.482) "would provide intellectual meeting point for all disciplines; a programme that inculcates in the students a broad based education which widens the students' intellectual horizons and endows candidates with necessary potentialities for effective and functional citizenship". One such programme is the General Studies Programme GSP.

The General Studies Programme is a programme designed to provide an intellectual meeting point for all disciplines, expand the intellectual horizon of students and therefore provide a broad-based, people-oriented and self-reliant education. 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 field of study and become better members of the society on the long run.
It can be emphasized here that there are wider dimensions to the issues of all-round development of Nigerian graduates and their counterparts all over the world. Ever changing demands and shifting opportunities characterize the 21st century workplace due to rapid globalization, innovation, information and communication technology. For example, a good health professional is more than just a competent nurse, good diagnostician, skilled surgeon or gifted scientist. In addition to technical knowledge and skills, a good health professional must also be equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to critically analyze situations, reason morally when presented with ethical dilemmas and work in culturally diverse environments. For the development of a holistic medical/health professional with both technical and humanistic judgment skills, humanities and social sciences were marked as important in medical education in UK (Macnaughton, 2000). The American model of a pre-requisite of completion of a four year undergraduate liberal arts degree prior to enrollment in a four year medical school is well established.

In response to the demands of the 21st century, higher institutions of learning are not only being held accountable for validating the contents of their courses through advisory boards and accrediting bodies, but they must also graduate students who are knowledgeable, competent and empowered to meet the ever changing needs of different aspect of General Studies to assist them in the industry (Dryden, 2008).

**Origin of the General Studies Programme**

It can be correctly said that in the Nigerian tertiary education system, the General Studies Programme is the brainchild of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, established by the University of Nigeria Law, 1961, (E.N.L. No 21 of 1961, Statute 6) (Anyadike, 2013). The College of General Studies as it was then called was included in the thirty-six Colleges listed for establishment in the University. Then, 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”).

At the beginning, the General Studies Programme of the University of Nigeria was criticized and ridiculed by students, the educated masses and other educational authorities who described the programme as “an aberration unworthy of attention of a serious University” (“University of Nigeria School of General Studies Undergraduate Academic Handbook”, p.7). After the initial criticism, the programme has since been embraced by every tertiary institution, and also attracted recognition by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The General Studies Programme was made compulsory in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria by the directive of General Olusegun Obasanjo, then Head of State, on October 22, 1977 (Anyadike, 2013).

**Philosophy of the General Studies Programme**

Objections to the establishment of General Studies have given way. The study has gained currency and the Nigerian higher education is better for it. Philosophically, the training of the mind to have broad spectrum knowledge and attain goals in relation to diverse matters has been the concern of education. We live in a world where science, arts, computer, technology, ideas, men and materials interact to shape lives. The general studies programme is based on the philosophy of providing intellectual knowledge and training that equip students to understand the complex dynamics of modern society, so that graduates from any discipline can function effectively in all fields, irrespective of his or her area of specialization.

In a nutshell, the main purpose and spirit of the General Studies Programme is to acquaint all the students with methodologies and technologies for an understanding of Nigeria’s heritage and the social and scientific aspects of the world today (University of Nigeria School of General Studies Undergraduate Academic Handbook, p.6). The great Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the major founding father of the University, had the strong belief that only a university with a broad-based educational programme at its “backbone” – that is, the General Studies – could meet the recommendations of the Phelps-Stokes Commission on African education, part of which goes thus:

> .... such an institution should be determined by the ability to develop the resources of the country, household arts, sound recreation, rudiments of knowledge, character development, community responsibility, access to the great truths of philosophy, the physical and social sciences and the inspiration of history, literature, and the arts. ("University of Nigeria School of General Studies Undergraduate Academic Handbook", pp. 5-6)

According to Azikiwe, as Nwaokike (2013, p.481) citing Ijomah (1986) noted: what was
dubbed the "colonial mentality" was only possible because the colonial education imprisoned the African intellectual potentialities and denied them avenues for meaningful expression." The liberal framework of the GS Programme was structured to address these issues.

Fafunwa (1984) in Ifih (1998, p.4) summarized the philosophy that guided the early planners of the General Studies Programme, thus:

- The most important aspect of any man is his belief system; that is, the sum total of the propositions which he takes to be true.
- Such a belief system cannot be articulated without the ability to handle language effectively.
- One can distinguish three dimensions of belief systems - those concerned with the social world in which man lives and which lives in each man; the natural world which forms man's physical environment and of which his body is composed; and the world of value as it is expressed in religion, literature, art, and philosophy.
- That it is possible to put into four courses of study a subject matter which when presented in an appropriate manner can improve a man's belief system.
- That every student in the university should be allowed to participate in these courses.

Based on this philosophy, the courses in the programme were originally grouped into four course units namely: The Use of English, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences and Humanities. The launching of the General Studies Programme in the 1951/52 academic session marked a significant development in university education in Nigeria. The programme has not only been embraced by other tertiary institutions, it attracted recognition by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Oluikpe in Ifih (1998, p.12) stated that following the directive from the then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo on October 22, 1977, General Studies Programme was made compulsory in all Nigerian universities.

Goals and Objectives of the General Studies Programme

The National Universities Commission NUC (2007) summarized the goal of General Studies Programme to include production of well rounded morally and intellectually capable graduates with vision and entrepreneurial skills in an environment of peace and social cohesion.

The objectives include:

- To prepare and equip undergraduates for effective academic work.
- To enable students gain deeper insight into their environment and ensure that before they settle down in their areas of specialization, they are exposed to major areas of learning in humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, use of English among several others.
- Acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society.
- The development of intellectual capacities of individuals to understand, appreciate and promote peaceful co-existence.
- To produce graduates with broad knowledge of the Nigerian Nation and people with a view to inculcating in them mutual understanding and patriotism.
- To prepare students for a post-university life with opportunities for job creation and entrepreneurial skills.
- To equip students with the English language and communication skills which are prerequisites for students' intellectual development and English language proficiency.
- To promote the spirit of self-reliance, self engagement and collaborative working skills in their special discipline.
- To facilitate the development of students' critical thinking; innovative and creative abilities in identifying opportunities in an increasing complex environment with a view to starting and successfully managing new ventures.
- General Studies courses will also inform the student on how to relate his skills to the society and the economy.
- To produce graduates who can make their professions relevant to contemporary problems and needs of the Nigerian society.
- It provides orientation needed for the integration of scientific and technological knowledge for socio-economic development and improvement of the quality of life of Nigerian citizens.

The Position of NUC and NBTE on the General Studies Programme

The National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), the regulating bodies for university and polytechnic education respectively, recognize the General Studies courses as compulsory requirements for the accreditation of any degree-awarding or diploma-awarding programme in Nigeria today. The directive of then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo, on 22nd October 1977, cited earlier, helped to institutionalize this.
The General Studies courses received special prominence in the NUC documents on minimum academic standards (MAS) - National Universities Commission: Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard for Undergraduate Programmes in Nigerian Universities, Arts, April 2007. This document is the result of several reviews done on the 1989 document on minimum academic standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities. Among the objectives of the updated Minimum Academic Standards are: to update the standard and relevance of university education in the country to integrate entrepreneurial studies and peace and conflict studies; and most importantly, to ensure that university graduates fit into the requirements of the new national and global economy. The updated NUC document is, ultimately, intended to:

...guarantee all graduates from Nigerian universities the knowledge of appropriate skills, competences and dispositions that will make them globally competitive and capable of contributing meaningfully in Nigeria’s socio-economic development. (National Universities Commission: Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard for Undergraduate Programmes in Nigerian Universities, Arts, April 2007, p.2)

The General Studies courses are also integral parts of the specifications of the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) for the award of the National Diplomas (ND) and the Higher National Diplomas (HND). According to the National Board for Technical Education: Standards for the Accreditation of Diploma Programmes in Polytechnics and Similar Post Secondary Technical Institutions (1993), the General Studies courses account for 10-15% of the contact hours allocated to the programmes, distributed by courses in the art, humanities, social and behavioural sciences, mathematics, basic sciences and physical and health education. The NBTE rationale for the inclusion of General Studies in the curriculum for each course is stated thus:

General Studies courses should be included in the curriculum of tertiary institutions so that students may improve their communication skills, oral and written, and their understanding of themselves, and their environment where they live, work and make useful contributions as worthy citizens of the country and the world at large. General Studies courses will also inform the student on how to relate his skills to the society and the economy.

The NBTE document further stipulates:

All students enrolled in the ND and HND programme, irrespective of discipline, are expected to take all modules in Use of English, Communication in English, Physical and Health Education, Contemporary Social Problems and Outline History of Nigeria (Citizenship). Other courses are taken as elective courses depending on the professional programme and the resources available to the institution to mount them.

Thus, the General Studies Programme in Nigerian universities and polytechnics directly aid the tertiary education institutions in achieving the general objective for which they were established. Borrowing the ideas of a UNESCO/IBE (2006) document on education, the guiding principle of education in Nigeria, today, is the equipping of every citizen with such knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as to enable him/her to derive maximum benefits from his/her membership in society, lead a fulfilling life and contribute to the development and welfare of the community.

The NUC General Studies Goals and Objectives
(Adapted from National Universities Commission: Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard for Undergraduate Programmes in Nigerian Universities, Arts, April 2007, pp. 15-19)

Goal: To produce well-rounded, morally and intellectually capable graduates with vision and entrepreneurial skills in an environment of peace and social cohesiveness.

Objectives:

a) Acquisition of development and inculcation of the proper value-orientation for the survival of the individual and society.

b) The development of intellectual capacities of individuals to understand, appreciate and promote peaceful co-existence.

c) Producing graduates with broad knowledge of the Nigerian nation and people with a view to inculcating in them mutual understanding and patriotism.

d) Exposing graduates of Nigerian universities to the rudiments of ICT for computer literacy and the ability to live usefully in this ICT age.
e) Preparing students for a post-university life with opportunities for job creation and entrepreneurial skills.

f) Production of graduates capable of communicating effectively (both oral and written).

**NBTE General Studies Goals and Objectives**
*(Adapted from National Board for Technical Education: General Studies Course Specifications for National Diploma and Higher National Diploma Programmes, 1999)*

**Goals:**

1. To provide a broad-based education designed to sharpen students' communication skills, their realization of the need for cross fertilization of ideas and the inter-relatedness of the various disciplines, as well as bridging the gap between what would have been otherwise two separate cultures, i.e. the literary and the scientific.

2. To inculcate the idea of national loyalty and understanding based on an awareness of the nation's roots and cultural antecedents, thus enabling students to come to grips with our societal morals, national aspirations, values and problems.

3. To produce a citizenry conscious of its role in a wider world, proud of its antecedents and prepared for effective leadership role in diversified fields in the society, thereby ensuring a positive contribution to national integration and greatness.

**THE GS Courses offered in sample Institutions**

**University of Ilorin**

The General Studies courses in this University are as follows:

a) GNS 111 – Use of English I (including Use of Library) (2 credits)

b) GNS 112 – Use of English II (2 credits)

c) GNS 211 – Philosophy, Logic and Nigerian Culture (2 credits)

d) GNS 212 – Introduction to Social Sciences and Citizenship Education (2 credits)

e) GNS 311 – History and Philosophy of Science (2 credits)

As stated in the University of Ilorin website, GNS 111 and 112 are normally offered during the first year in the University by freshers at 100 and 200 levels; GNS 211 and 212 are for students not below 200 level; while GNS 311 is offered by students not below 300 level.

**University of Ibadan**

In the University of Ibadan website, the following directives concerning their General Studies Programme are found: All students must take and pass GES 101 (Use of English), GES 107 (Reproductive Health, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), GES 201 (Use of English II), GES 301 (Introduction to Entrepreneurial Skills) and two other courses (14 units) before graduating, provided a student does not take more than 6 units of the General Studies Courses in any one session. Faculties are expected to advise their students on the GES Courses that will help achieve the objectives of the General Studies Programme.

Further guidelines on the General Studies in the University of Ibadan include:

- The 14 units from the General Studies Programme shall be counted as compulsory in the computation of results.
- All students irrespective of their Faculties shall register for GES 101 (Use of English) in the first year of their degree programme.
- Except in the case of the Use of English (GES 101), no student shall register for a GES course in his/her area of specialization.

**University of Nigeria, Nsukka**

In the University of Nigeria, Nsukka the General Studies Division is made up of four main departments/units: Use of English, Social Sciences, Natural Science and Humanities. The Use of English Unit offers 2 courses: GSP 101 (Use of English I), and GSP 102 (Use of English II). Two courses, GSP 207 (Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence), and GSP 208 (Nigerian Peoples and Cultures) are offered in the Humanities Unit. In the Social Sciences Unit, GSP 201 (The Social Science) and GSP 202 (Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies) are offered. GSP 105 (Introduction to Natural Science I) and GSP 106 (Introduction to Natural Science II) are the two courses offered in the Natural Science Unit.

Every undergraduate student takes the Use of English courses, even the students studying the English Language as their major subject. Out of the three remaining GS courses, every student takes at least two, which should be outside his chosen discipline.

**Delta State Polytechnic, Oghwashi-Uku**

The School of General Studies in this Polytechnic has three major departments: Department of Arts and Humanities, Department of Science, and Department of Languages. The philosophy of the School of General Studies in the institution is complementary to the overall philosophy of Delta State Polytechnic, Oghwashi-Uku, evident in its
motto: “Creative for Development”. Hence, the School of General Studies of the Polytechnic, in their website, states thus: “We are concerned with imparting in our students a sense of creativity and self-reliance to foster the worth and development of the individual and the society by means of functional and broad based education”.

Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu
The Institute of Management and Technology (IMT), Enugu has not officially published a Document on the Institute’s General Studies Programme. She uses the general NBTE specifications on the General Studies courses, published in 1999.

The School of General Studies in IMT has three functioning Departments: Department of Language Studies, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, and Department of Basic Sciences. The Department of Language Studies offers all the ‘Use of English’ and ‘Communication in English’ courses (eight in number) seen in the NBTE Regulations. The courses are taught to all the ND and HND students respectively, from their first year to the final year, in the first and second semesters.

It is pertinent to note that there are new General Studies courses not in the NBTE 1999 specifications that have been creatively introduced by IMT’s Academic Board. They include MAC 116 (Igbo for Beginners I), MAC 129 (Indigenous Language II), MAC 112 (French for Beginners I) and MAC 122 (French for Beginners II). These “French” and “Igbo” courses are taught by experts in these areas in the Department of Language Studies of the School of General Studies of the IMT.

The Marriage of THREE Bed Fellows: Arts, Social Sciences and Technology
The Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities components in the General Studies curricula prepare the scientist and the technologist to be a cultured and useful citizen. They provide him an insightful understanding into moral, ethical and ideological forces. A successful society depends upon altruism, charity, civility, compassion and generosity and the social sciences and humanities evaluate and emphasize the importance of these characteristics. The liberal arts introduce aesthetic values to students which is the key to living a meaningful life.

Study of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences allows science and technology students to become familiar with and use the creative ideas from great minds outside of science. Biography, literature and history offer a window into the understanding of human nature and society. They introduce the scientist and the technologist to thoughts and ideas from outside their specialist areas and can have relevance to finding new directions and enhance creative thinking. For example, a classic case that demonstrates the influence of social sciences and humanities on science can be seen in Charles Darwin’s development of the theory of evolution by natural selection. In his On the Origin of Species, his autobiography, Darwin revealed that the principal insight that led to his theory of evolution was his knowledge of Malthus’ population theory which states that populations increase geometrically while food supplies grow arithmetically.

The state-of-the-art in scientific knowledge and techniques which the students in science and technology discipline learn in the university have a limited shelf life; mastering the humanities provides tools for extending it. Just as cars have an approximate 10-year road life and high-tech gadgets last 2 or 3 years before they become obsolete, the preparation for a scientific career which one receives in school will make the individual competitive for a finite period only. The study of social sciences and humanities, both in its pursuit and the perspective it provides, rewards the student in technology and science disciplines with the skills needed for self-critical reflection, adaptability, and self-teaching. These are the functions needed to be an independent learner, thereby extending one’s scientific knowledge and technical abilities throughout ones professional career.

Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities disciplines help strengthen the students in technology and science disciplines with the ability to communicate and work with others. The scientists chafe at the stereotype held by some that they belong to a class of socially awkward ‘geek’ that are unable to communicate their ideas clearly. The old classical liberal arts education and the methods of study enhance one’s ability to work well with others and communicate properly via the spoken and written word.

Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences help scientists and technologists to understand the impact which science and technology have had on society and understand future scientific needs of society. The study of literature, history, and philosophy by students in science and technology disciplines will help shed light on the influence science has had on the quality of people’s lives and on the shaping of society, both positively or negatively. The knowledge of humanities and arts
inform the scientist of society’s needs and are important considerations for the concerned scientist to appreciate and learn from, including the consideration in where they choose to work, and what projects they choose to undertake.

Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences teach students in science and technology disciplines that the supposedly sharp dichotomies which separate science from arts, social sciences and humanities do not really exist. It is a general belief among scientists that science deals with facts while humanities deal with values. Science and technology, far from being value-neutral, are the embodiment of values in theories, things and therapies, in facts and artifacts, in procedures and programs, suggesting that science and technology are part of culture [and] that research traditions cannot be reasonably claimed to be set above the prevailing world view of the epoch.

In summary, I believe this is the most compelling reason why the knowledge of values gained through the study of arts, social sciences and the humanities is important to scientists and technologists.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we ordinarily think of marriage as a union between two bedfellows. The unique union of three bedfellows – Arts, Social Sciences and Technology, at its intellectual meeting point, and midwifed through a program of General Studies, has given birth to a very unique and quintessentially new Nigerian graduate citizen.

This new Nigerian graduate is empowered by a broad-based education which has widened his intellectual horizon; endowed him with the necessary potentialities for effective and functional citizenship; and provided him the intellectual knowledge, sagacity and training which equip him to understand the complex dynamics of modern society, so that he can function maximally and effectively in diverse fields, irrespective of his primary area of specialization.

The DNA powering this new Nigerian graduate citizen is the General Studies program. It must continue and be allowed to flourish maximally in our Nigerian Tertiary education system.
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