

## 'Clio' in Danger: The Causes, Condition and Consequences of the Decline of Interest in History in Perspective



Adjei Adjepong<sup>1</sup> , Charles Adabo Opong<sup>2</sup>  &  
Joseph Udimal Kachim<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of History, Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies - University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Education, College of Education Studies - University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

### ABSTRACT

History, which was a popular discipline in the past, is now one of the marginalised subjects in schools, while many people today also pay little attention to the events which occurred in their past lives. Several causes have combined to bring about this unfortunate state of affairs which, in turn, has produced some adverse consequences. Essentially, the problem of the decline of interest in history has three parts to it: causes, conditions and consequences. Using both primary and secondary data and employing the qualitative approach, this study generally examined the problem of the decline of interest in history in the context of what it calls the “3 Cs” of historical events<sup>1</sup>. The paper arbitrarily categorised the causes of the decline into “historical thoughts” and “historical deeds”, and showed the extent to which each has contributed to the existing condition. It then provided empirical evidence to show the reality and universality of the decline. After displaying the cause-and-effect relationship between the causes and the condition, the study, in a brief fashion, identified and analysed some of the major consequences of the decline of interest in history. In its conclusion, the paper first re-emphasised the thesis of the study and evaluated the authenticity of the framework adopted for the study. Finally, the paper recommends that efforts must be made to regenerate interest in history and place the discipline back in its rightful position in the school curriculum.

Correspondence  
Charles Adabo Opong  
Email: [coppong@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:coppong@ucc.edu.gh)

Publication History  
Received 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2022  
Accepted 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2023  
Published online 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2023

**Keywords:** *Causes, Condition, Consequences, Decline of History, Historical Deeds and Historical Thoughts*

### INTRODUCTION

There is evidence that the Arts and Literature occupied an enviable position in society during the medieval times in European history when festivals at which poets and orators demonstrated their talents and competed for fame and pride were organised. Since history, also known as *Clio*,<sup>1</sup> had not

<sup>1</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, the term *Muse* simply refers to any of the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, who were believed to be the protectors or in charge of particular arts and sciences. In their wisdom, the Greeks assigned these Muses – nine daughters (goddesses) – to all the then known disciplines, and *Clio* was made the Muse of History. Accordingly, when used in academic discourse, *Clio* simply means History. See A. Adu Boahen, *Clio and Nation-Building in Africa* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1975), 4.

yet become an entirely separate branch of study at this time from Literature and Rhetoric,<sup>2</sup> the ancient Greek historians had to deliver the substance of their historical works by word of mouth at public places.<sup>3</sup> Also, in precolonial Africa, there were people, generally referred to as custodians of the past, oral traditionists or court officials, who were trained to study and memorise the histories of their states and peoples and recount them during important state functions as well as transmit them to succeeding generations. Later, academic history, as a subject studied in schools, also became very popular with the establishment of institutions of higher learning.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, several factors had combined and conspired to bring history into a state of disrepute in Europe.<sup>4</sup> In Asia, Africa and Latin America, the destruction the continents suffered during the period of European imperialism and colonisation distorted and almost buried the histories of these continents and intentionally prevented any systematic study of their memorable past.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the rise of nationalism during the second half of the nineteenth century resuscitated interest in the study of history in Europe. The rise of nationalism in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the retreat of European colonial powers from these continents in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also led, once again, to a revival of interest in the acquisition of historical knowledge about these areas and their indigenous inhabitants.

These highlights show that general interest in history and the respect accorded the study of the significant past have taken a ‘rise-and-fall’ course. Indeed, at the moment, the *health condition* of history is really poor.<sup>6</sup> Various studies conducted from the last decades of the twentieth century to the present indicate that interest in the past and the popularity of history have suffered from a consistent decline, heading towards decay. For example, in 2013, the Department of History at the University of Cape Coast highlighted the marginalisation of history as a subject at pre-tertiary levels in Ghana.<sup>7</sup> After carefully observing the present condition of history, G.J. Renier has emphasised that “The welfare of history, as a branch of human knowledge, is exposed to dangers more serious than rhetorical ignorance.”<sup>8</sup> In second-cycle institutions, especially, where attempts are made to keep it alive, the study of history is shuffled into the shelter of social studies, making it now one of several social sciences studied in one short period each day, or, even in some cases, once a week. Admittedly, history is now marginalised as it enjoys only minimal attention in most educational institutions across the world.

---

<sup>2</sup> In the medieval period, History was not distinguishable from Literature and Rhetoric. See, for example, Kwabena Adu-Boahen, “Research and Teaching History in Ghana – Challenges and Prospects”, paper presented at Historical Society of Ghana/Danish History Teachers Association and Culture, Education and Technology Network (CETNET) Seminar, Kwabena Nketia Conference Hall, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra (February 14, 2011), 2.

<sup>3</sup> See how the original edition of Herodotus’ study, *The Histories*, for example, begins: “These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, and what follows is a series of reports for oral delivery.” This is what is recorded in the original work. See Jacques Barzun and Henry E. Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, Third Edition (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977), 39.

<sup>4</sup> R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, Second Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 277–278.

<sup>5</sup> In the case of Africa, see Adjei Adjepong, “The Image of Pre-Colonial Africa in European Circles”, in Eric Sakyi Nketiah, ed., *Distance Forum: A Multidisciplinary Book of Scholarly Articles*, Volume 1 (London: AuthorHouse, 2011), 15–37, especially 25–28. Note that before the European colonisation, West Africa, in particular, and Africa, in general, had suffered several external attacks in which several renowned universities, rich libraries, public archives, private homes and institutions, containing thousands of books and records of African cultures, sciences, mystery systems, and religions, were looted or burnt. For the evidence, see Osafo K. Osei, *A Discourse on Akan Perpetual Calendar: For Religious Ceremonies and Festivals – 1700–2200 A.D.* (Accra: Domak Press Ltd., 1997), xiii and 5.

<sup>6</sup> In Ghana, History has been reintroduced as a core subject in basic or pre-tertiary schools. Hence, this study applies more to the period before the reintroduction in 2018; however, the study is generally applicable to the situation of Ghana, especially as the implementation of the reintroduction has just started in basic schools.

<sup>7</sup> Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast, *Faculty Brochure 2013–2016* (Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast Press, 2013), 58.

<sup>8</sup> G.J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), 5.

The authors, like many other stakeholders, believe that something must surely be done to regenerate interest in the study of history. They are, however, convinced that for stakeholders to be able to address the problem appropriately, it is essential to know and understand, first, the specific context in which the decline of interest in, and popularity of, history exists today. In the case of Ghana, this knowledge and understanding is even more crucial in the sense that knowing and understanding the present context of the decline of history would enable researchers to measure, in the future, the success or otherwise of the reintroduction of the study of history in pre-tertiary institutions.<sup>9</sup> Given all these considerations, the general objective of this study is to examine the context in which the decline of history has occurred. Specifically, however, this study has a three-fold objective: to account for the decline of interest in the study of history as a subject in academic institutions; to assess, through empirical evidence, the current condition of history; and to evaluate the effects of this condition. Hence, the general question the study seeks to address is: “In what context has the decline of history occurred?” The specific questions the paper attempts to answer are: “What major factors have contributed to the decline of interest in the study of history?; what empirical evidence is available to show the reality of the condition of the decline of interest in history at present?; and what are some of the major consequences of the decline of history?” In consonance with these questions, the discussion has been divided into three major components in a cause-and-effect relationship: the causes of the decline of history; evidence of the condition of the decline of history; and the consequences of the decline of history.<sup>10</sup>

### Chronological Dialectics and Historical Connections: Conceptual Framework

Cause and effect deals [sic] rather entirely with a whole series or chain of events, one following the other in perfect succession. In this context, an event may be defined as something occurring as a direct result of a preceding event, and is therefore part of a flow of such events, all of which ultimately originate directly from The Source .... Therefore there is always, without exception, a relationship between any specific event and everything preceding it, and subsequently everything that follows.<sup>11</sup>

To talk of the causes, conditions and consequences of anything is to assume first that the subject under review is an *event*, a term which comes from the Latin word *eventus*, meaning *a happening, an incident or an occurrence*.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the decline of history itself and its causes, conditions and consequences are all events in themselves. Some scholars have defined history as *what has actually happened* or, as Henry Johnson puts it, *everything that ever happened*.<sup>13</sup> Hence, to the extent that the causes, conditions and consequences of the decline of history are all developments that have already taken place, with some of the causes going as far back as the sixteenth century or even earlier, they are all historical events,<sup>14</sup> – they have all really occurred. The term *historical* refers to something that happened over a specific period in the past.

---

<sup>9</sup> Adjei Adjepong, Historical Society of Ghana, “Resuscitating ‘Clio’ in Twenty-First-Century Ghana: A Proposal to the Nana Akufo-Addo-NPP Government for Making History a Core Subject in Senior High Schools in Ghana” (January, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Readers should note, however, that even though the study focuses on the causes, condition and consequences of the decline of history, more attention has been given to the causes than the condition and consequences. In fact, we have paid very little attention to the consequences, mainly because of the fact that some of the consequences double as causes of the condition. And since we have explained the causes in detail, we feel that there is no need to repeat these explanations under the consequences.

<sup>11</sup> Adrian P. Cooper, “The Universal Law of Cause and effect”, *Our Ultimate Reality*, Date Accessed August 18, 2019, <https://ourultimatereality.com/the-universal-law-of-cause-and-effect.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Collins English Dictionary, “Definition and Meaning of ‘Event’”, accessed January 2, 2019, from [www.collinsdictionary.com/amp/english/event](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/amp/english/event).

<sup>13</sup> Paominlen Kipgen, “Historiography, Definitions, Nature and Scope of History”, Date Accessed August 17, 2019, [academia.edu/31041228/Historiography\\_Definitions\\_Nature\\_and\\_Scope\\_of\\_History](http://academia.edu/31041228/Historiography_Definitions_Nature_and_Scope_of_History).

<sup>14</sup> Readers should note that in spite of considering the factors as historical events, we have used present tenses in the interpretation of the facts. This is called the *historical present*, meaning the use of present tenses in the explanation and

Historians study historical events in the contexts of space and time. The event that is of concern here – the decline of history – is a time-like event which has causes, conditions and consequences. The causes, conditions and consequences, arranged in a linear pattern and considered as strictly corresponding to the three divisions of time – the past, the present and the future, constitute the constant variables of the theory of *the “3 Cs” of historical events* or simply *historical connections*, which is firmly founded on the concept of time, and its division into the past, the present, and the future, and the relationship of successions or interconnections between them. The relationship between these three dimensions of time could best be described as one of chronological dialectics. In Hegelian philosophy, dialectics is broadly defined either as the logical subjective development in thought from *thesis* through *antithesis* to *synthesis*, or the logical objective development in history by the continuous reconciliation or unification of parts or opposites.<sup>15</sup> Thus, dialectics is the theory of the union of opposites consisting of a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis. The thesis might be an idea or a historical movement which contains within itself incompleteness that gives rise to an opposition, or an antithesis, a conflicting idea or a movement. As a result of the conflict, a third point of view, a synthesis, arises to overcome the conflict by reconciling at a higher level the truth contained in both the thesis and antithesis and avoiding their limitations.<sup>16</sup> This synthesis becomes a new thesis that generates another antithesis and gives rise to a new synthesis, and in such a fashion, the process of intellectual or historical development is continually generated. As is clear, the thesis, antithesis and synthesis are all parts of the same process, evolving or emerging only at different times in a changing but continuous process. In the same way, the past, the present and the future are different but continuous parts of the same river of time. In essence, the present is a connection or a link between the past and the future. Perceived this way, time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now, and those which are to occur.

Placing the causes, the conditions, and the consequences of the problem or event in a parallel position against the past, the present and the future, the relationship or equation that would be established would be one of ‘past-causes→present-conditions→future-consequences.’ This shows that there are connections between the causes, conditions and consequences of historical events which, thus, establish links between the past, the present and the future; hence, *historical connections*. This means that each major historical event has three component events in itself. They evolve first as consequences of earlier events, then transform into conditions, and finally turn into causal agents of future or later historical events. In their continuous or chain order, therefore, each of these three segments exists as a condition and then produces an effect of its own. In this sense, all three parts – cause(s), condition(s), and consequence(s) – are causes in themselves. Basically, the law of cause and effect states that nothing happens by chance or outside the universal laws. Every human thought, word and deed is a cause that sets off a wave of energy throughout the universe which in turn, creates the effect, whether desirable or undesirable. The law maintains that every cause has an effect, and every effect becomes the cause of something else, suggesting that the universe is always in motion and progresses from a chain of events.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the effect of the causes – the condition (decline of history), produces the consequences. Further, the law of cause and effect asserts that *for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction* – action-reaction are equal and opposite; whatever you send into the universe comes back.<sup>18</sup> This means that some, if not all, of the causes of the condition would resurge, re-emerge, incarnate, come back in the future in the form of consequences of the very condition they

---

description of historical events – events set in the past. Our reason is that although the *causes* of the problem – the thoughts and deeds – are historical in nature, the *effect* of the causes – the condition or the decline of history – as well as the consequences of the condition are existing phenomena; they are still with us – their courses have not yet ended, and we do not know how soon they would cease.

<sup>15</sup> Karl R. Popper, “What is Dialectic”, in E. von Goldammer, ed., *Vordenker*, Summer Edition (2004), 2, Date Accessed March 25, 2014, [www.vordenker.de](http://www.vordenker.de).

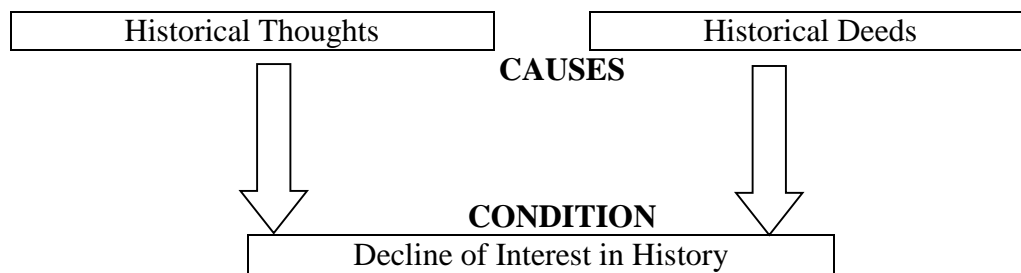
<sup>16</sup> Popper, “What is Dialectic”.

<sup>17</sup> Camillo Loken, “The Law of Cause and Effect”, *One Mind – One Energy*, Date Accessed August 18, 2019, <https://www.one-mind-one-energy.com/law-of-cause-and-effect.html>.

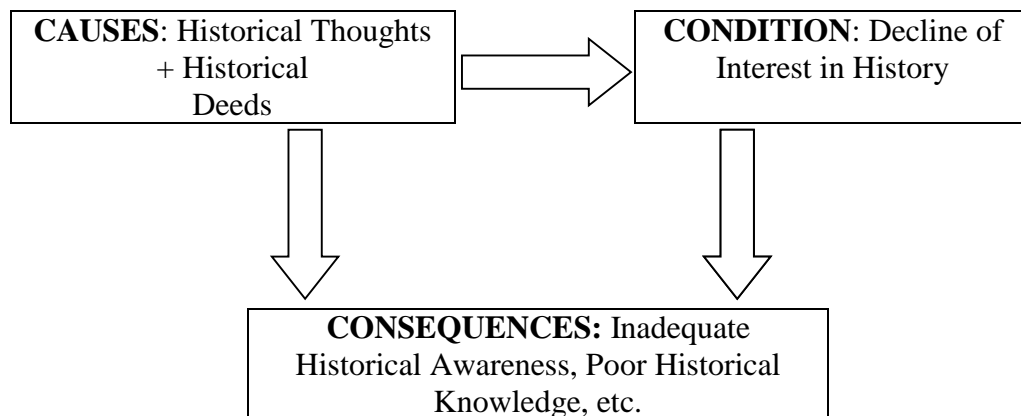
<sup>18</sup> Loken, “The Law of Cause and Effect”.

created and exist contemporaneously with their handicraft, the condition – that is action returning to its source in the form of effect.<sup>19</sup> All things being equal, the consequences would also assume the same, or either (if positive) an improved or (if negative) a worse, form of the causes. In Ralph Waldo Emerson’s view, the Law of Cause and Effect is so powerful that it appears to establish strong and direct bonds between the causes (origins) and consequences (effects) of conditions (events). Emerson argues that “If you put a negative out, you will get a negative back. Also, when you put a positive out, you will get a positive back. It is the Law and the Laws of the Universe never err once.”<sup>20</sup>

The researchers have categorised all the causes of the decline of history available into two: historical thoughts and historical deeds. Since, the *condition* – decline of history – has been produced by both the historical thoughts and historical deeds – *causes*, the relationship between the causes and the condition could be expressed diagrammatically as follows:



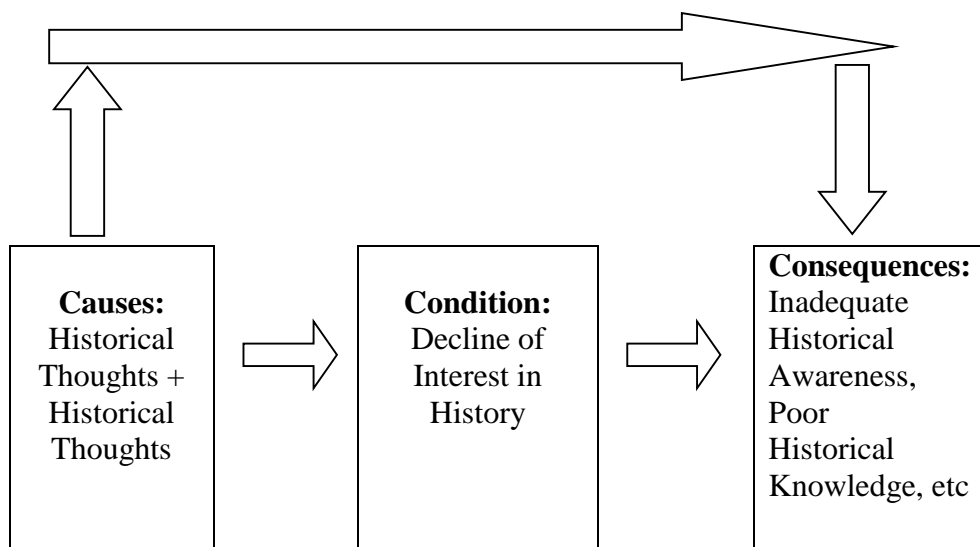
Mathematically, the message the above diagram conveys is that *historical thoughts + historical deeds = decline of interest in history*. When the consequences of the decline of history are brought into the equation, the relationship between the causes, condition and consequences could be expressed either as:



<sup>19</sup> Open College UK Ltd., “Law of Cause and Effect”, accessed on August 18, 2019, from <https://www.opencollege.info/law-of-cause-and-effect/>.

<sup>20</sup>Loken, “The Law of Cause and Effect”.

or as:



This framework offers an important perspective for understanding how the interplay of historical thoughts and historical deeds has created the condition of the decline of history and produced some undesirable consequences. Different researchers would likely accumulate different facts in different cases and, thus, identify different factors as the causes, which would automatically produce a condition and its effects, but the different nature of the causes would also produce conditions and consequences of different kinds and forms. Despite this, their interpretations would all be the same – they would all take the same form of *cause(s)-condition-consequence(s)*. Their symbolic or diagrammatical representations would also take the same form and depict the same picture.

In this case, as the relationships among the causes, conditions and consequences stand now, six (6) variables are available: *two (2) causes, two (2) conditions and two (2) consequences*. For the two causes, the *historical thoughts* and the *historical deeds* are the original causes (Cause 1 or First Cause). Specifically, they constitute the immediate causes of the condition and the remote causes of the consequences. If it is agreed that all things being equal, thinking precedes, and leads to action, then one may assume that the historical thoughts preceded and produced the historical deeds.<sup>21</sup> In this way, with reference to the condition alone, the thoughts and deeds would represent the remote and immediate causes respectively. Accordingly, the historical thoughts are remote-cause 1 (1st C<sub>1</sub>) and the deeds immediate-cause 1 (2nd C<sub>1</sub>). The condition, in turn, becomes Cause 2 and serves as the immediate cause of the consequences. Regarding the two conditions, the *main condition* in the equation (decline of history – Cause 2) is the first or immediate condition created by the causes (Cause 1). Cause 2 is then Condition 1 or First Condition. The consequences become the remote conditions created by the causes and the immediate condition emanating from the main condition. The consequences are, therefore, condition 2. Concerning the two consequences, the main condition (cause 2) is the first or immediate consequence of the original or main causes (Cause 1). The main condition (Cause 2) is, thus, also consequence 1. The *main consequences* (condition 2) are the remote consequences of the original causes (Cause 1), and the immediate consequences of the main condition (Cause 2 or Condition 1). Hence, the consequences are also Consequence 2. When considered strictly in such a linear causes-condition-consequences relationship, the *causes* are the *1st C*, the *condition* the *2nd C*, and the *consequences* the *3rd C*. In the final analysis, it is evident that the causes originating from historical thoughts and historical deeds, the condition of the decline of history, and the various consequences of the condition are, through the principle of cause-and-effect, connected in a causes-

<sup>21</sup> The relationship between thinking and action has been expressed thus: “All thoughts lead to movements or human behaviour and all movement and behaviour leads to further thoughts.” See Open College UK Ltd., “Law of Cause and Effect”.

condition-consequences pattern that has implications for careful analysis.<sup>22</sup> Since any theory of scientific history must arise from the nature of the material to be satisfactory, it is essential to interrogate the three component parts of the decline of history to ascertain how connected they really are and how well the framework explains and addresses the problem under review.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

Historical research works are usually qualitative in nature. Hence, the qualitative method was used in conducting the study. In line with the general and specific objectives of the study, the study began with a search for the causes of the decline of interest in history. These causes were arbitrarily put into two broad categories: *historical thoughts* and *historical deeds*. Each category was further broken down into independent but related variables. After this, the authors evaluated the contribution of each variable. Thereafter, they provided empirical evidence to show the nature and extent of the condition of the decline of history. Finally, they examined the consequences of the decline of history. To do all this, data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The major secondary works consulted for data included Diane Ravitch, “Decline and Fall of Teaching History” (1985); Tim Nuttal and John Wright, “Probing the Predicaments of Academic History in Contemporary South Africa” (1999); Encyclopaedia Britannica, “The Study of History” (2003); Folasade O. Ifammose, “History and the Challenges of Nation Building: A Comparative Analysis of Nigerian and American Experiences” (2006); D.A. Dwarko, “History – The Ailing Subject: The Need for Revival in the 21st Century” (2007); Benjamin N.E. Donkor, “Rehabilitating the Image of History in Ghana” (2009); and Samuel Olusoji Oyeranmi, “The Place of History in the 21st Century African Communities – The Nigerian Experience” (2011).

These works have been used because of their relevance to the topic; for they have provided evidence on the decline of interest in history.<sup>23</sup> Again, information was extracted from both published and unpublished primary documents. In addition, interviews were conducted with some teachers and students of history, as well as non-history students and teachers, to find out their views and impressions about history, to corroborate the data gathered from the secondary accounts. The same questions were sent to some people via WhatsApp and responses were received. Such individuals were informed of the objective of the study, and they willingly granted their permission to cite their views in the work. The views and conclusions of both the secondary works and primary information have helped to put the paper in a proper perspective. The authors were very much aware of the limitations of historical documents, as with all documents in all fields of study. They envisaged the likelihood of distortion of facts, exaggeration, understatement and other limitations normally associated with historical documents. Thus, they deemed it necessary to carefully scrutinise and internally and externally critique all the data collected from the available sources to present only the accurate and reliable facts. In sum, the study incorporated the hallowed traditions of historical scholarship: rigorous empirical research, systematic analysis of data, and objectivity.

### 1st C – The Causes: *Historical Thoughts and Historical Deeds*

Causes of historical events are antecedent events that have links, or with which connections are established, with outcomes based on scientific theories and historical experience.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, the present unfortunate situation in which history finds itself is the outcome of a myriad of causes. The causes that have been discovered by researchers working on area-specific topics include ignorance;

<sup>22</sup> Note that the values attached to the causes, condition and consequences have implications for understanding the real value of historical events, and their causes, conditions and consequences.

<sup>23</sup> In this study, all internet materials used have been duly cited in the text, as is usually done. However, I have provided only the surnames of the authors (where available), the full titles of the works and the dates on which I accessed them. The website addresses are not added in the text. With regard to interviews, I have provided only the surnames of the respondents and the dates on which I interviewed them. Readers are entreated to refer to the *References* at the end of the study for the full website addresses of all internet materials used and the full details of all interviewees.

<sup>24</sup> Robert J. Richards, “The Role of Biography in Intellectual History”, *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* (Fall 2017), 5.

the characterisation of history as somehow antique and remote to students' interests; the view that history is a disturbing and dangerous discipline; and the thought that history is an obstacle to present and future progress.<sup>25</sup> Other causes are the problem of unqualified history teachers or teachers who have no background in history or do not know much history to teach it; poor teaching approaches; inadequate or lack of teaching and learning resources; the seeming irrelevance of history to the real changing world; unfavourable government policies which tend to merge history with other subjects; and the nature of the history curriculum itself.<sup>26</sup> Truly, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the identified variables and the phenomenon of the decline of history. As is obvious, scholars who have already explored the field usually do not categorise the causes into any groups or organise them under any themes. However, the factors they have identified as the causes are similar to those the authors sought to interrogate in accounting for the same problem, the only difference being the slightly or somehow global perspective of the present study.

At any rate, it is observed from the nature and origins of the causes that the problems of history today are internal challenges and external attacks of various kinds and forms. In view of this, it would have been ideal to examine the causes in an internal-external, input-output, or 'pull and push' perspective. While appreciating the validity of this approach and its usefulness to this paper, given either the input or output characteristics of the facts available, the authors believe, however, that the determinants of the ill-health and descent of history could equally be put into two fundamental categories, namely *historical thoughts* and *historical deeds*, what Bertrand Russell calls *mental events* and *physical events*.<sup>27</sup> *Thoughts* and *deeds* here mean the rather misguided views and flawed understanding people have had about history, and what has actually been done, or what has occurred, to put history in a position of disrepute respectively. Accordingly, the authors have arbitrarily categorised the *thought* factors examined in this study as consisting of misunderstanding and distrust of history; history considered as a dead and useless subject; the view that history is a disturbing and dangerous discipline; and the thought that history is an obstacle to present and future progress. Under the *deeds* category, they discuss the lack of qualified teachers; unrefined teaching methodology; dictates of the job market; and official government policy. These classifications and descriptions have been done on the basis that a *thought* could be an idea, an opinion, a view, a judgement, or a belief, while a *deed* means that which is done or effected by a responsible agent, an act, an action, or something done. In any case, they have examined first the historical thoughts followed by the historical deeds on the assumption that "A movement or an action cannot take place without its original thought or its preceding thought."<sup>28</sup>

### A. The Historical Thoughts

#### *Misunderstanding and Distrust of History*

The descriptions people give to things are usually the reflections of their personal views of those things. Some people have described history in ways that reveal their lack of understanding of what the discipline really is and also portray their contempt for the subject, coupled with their complete ignorance of the significance of the study of the past to the present and the future. For instance, Ambrose Bierce, in his cynical review of the human condition, *The Devil's Dictionary*, defines history

<sup>25</sup> Diane Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History" (1985), Date Accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/17/magazine/decline-and-fall-of-teaching-history.html?pagewanted=5>; Lucy Hodges, "The Big Question: Why Are Fewer Pupils Studying History, and What Can be Done About It", Date Accessed on May 23, 2019, [www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-big-question-why-are-fewer-pupils-studying-history-and-what-can-be-done-about-it-1691115.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-big-question-why-are-fewer-pupils-studying-history-and-what-can-be-done-about-it-1691115.html); Karol Markowicz, "Why Schools Have Stopped Teaching American History", Date Accessed May 23, 2019, [nypost.com/2017/01/22/why-schools-have-stopped-teaching-american-history/](http://nypost.com/2017/01/22/why-schools-have-stopped-teaching-american-history/).

<sup>26</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History"; Hodges, "The Big Question: Why Are Fewer Pupils Studying History, and What Can be Done About It"; Markowicz, "Why Schools Have Stopped Teaching American History"; Richard J. Evans, "Make History Compulsory for the Right Reasons", Date Accessed May 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/26/history-compulsory-right-reasons>.

<sup>27</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, First Paperback Printing (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1962), 230.

<sup>28</sup> Open College UK Ltd., "Law of Cause and Effect".

as “An account mostly false, of events mostly unimportant, which are brought about by rulers mostly knaves, and soldiers mostly fools.”<sup>29</sup> And while some other people think of history as a boring list of names and dates, others consider it as an irrelevant record of revolutions and battles, or the meaningless stories of kings, queens and other rulers.

There are also those who pour scorn on the work of historians because they see nothing but futility in their trade. Presentist philosophies regard the past as unreal. They hold the view that the past is absolutely irrecoverable. This suggests that there are people who distrust any study of the past because they feel that what passes for history is only a mass of fables, a vast network of incomplete stories upon which perspectives are arbitrarily imposed by historians. Again, many natural or physical scientists distrust history because they imagine, rather misguidedly, that history adopts an unwarranted attitude of certainty, proclaims resignation and gradualism, and precludes open-mindedness and enterprise.<sup>30</sup> In addition, some of these scientists expect history to make use of mathematical and statistical methods, and sociological formulations, elements which historians try, in most cases, to guard against because of their potential to distort historical realities, despite their usefulness in terms of permitting meaning to be attached to a group of otherwise dumb and disconnected facts. Palmer and Colton show that in the seventeenth century, there was much scepticism about history.<sup>31</sup> Some people argued that history was not a form of true knowledge because it was not mathematical. Postmodernist scholars have also argued that historical writing cannot attempt to reflect the true realities of the past because the past has no objectively knowable existence of its own.<sup>32</sup> Because of their relativist position on the issues of objectivity, reality and truth, they maintain that history does not possess sufficient value to warrant an extensive formal programme of instruction in schools. In the view of the postmodernists, it is a waste of effort to study a subject like history which bears only a tentative and subjective relation to reality. They argue that history belongs to the sciences that study human action, and since humans can alter what they have done to suit their desires, history could never present an objective view of the past.<sup>33</sup> Considering history as no science, they reject everything that history teaches.<sup>34</sup> Their strongest argument, probably, is that truth is absent from history because it lacks the form, and the formulas, of the natural sciences.<sup>35</sup> Several scholars, including Peter Novick, Frank Furedi, Keith Windschuttle, George Iggers and Richard Evans, have identified postmodernism and its attacks on the established notions of historical objectivity and truth as a major challenge to the survival of history, particularly starting from the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>36</sup>

These erroneous impressions of and intellectual attacks on history are highly unfortunate and worrying because they cast a slur on the integrity of the discipline, and if they were true, then history, as Robert Partin has noted, has no place in our culture as a major discipline, and, certainly, no place in our over-crowded school curriculum.<sup>37</sup> Fortunately, there is enough evidence to show that most of them are false, outdated, overly exaggerated, or grossly and intentionally misinterpreted. First, it is

---

<sup>29</sup> Lanny B. Fields, Russell J. Barber and Cheryl A. Riggs, *The Global Past*, Volume One (Boston: Bedford Books, and New York: St. Martin's, 1988), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Palmer and Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 277.

<sup>32</sup> Tim Nuttal and John Wright, “Probing the Predicaments of Academic History in Contemporary South Africa”, a paper for the ‘International Conference on New African Perspectives: Africa, Australasia and the Wider World at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’, organised by the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, at Perth, Australia (November 26–28, 1999), 12.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, “The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design”, in Richard M. Ebeling, ed., *Champions of Freedom: Austrian Economics: A Reader: The Ludwig von Mises Lecture Series*, Volume 18 (Hillsdale, Michigan: Hillsdale College Press, 1991), 141.

<sup>34</sup> Ludwig von Mises, “Social Science and Natural Science”, in Richard M. Ebeling, ed., *Champions of Freedom: Austrian Economics: A Reader: The Ludwig von Mises Lecture Series*, Volume 18 (Hillsdale, Michigan: Hillsdale College Press, 1991), 93.

<sup>35</sup> Barzun and Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 125.

<sup>36</sup> Nuttal and Wright, “Predicaments of Academic History”, 12–13.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Partin, “The Meaning of History: “A Different Approach Entirely””, *The Historian*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (May 1969), 433.

essential to note that history is not a catalogue, but a convincing version of events. Neither is it a mere succession of events; rather, it is the link between them. Again, to say that another period's realities are visually inaccessible and that things past cannot be recalled in their exact forms is quite understandable. Because of time, climatic conditions, poor handling of documents or the intentional destruction of them, lack of the appropriate facts, and allied factors, it is often difficult to reconstruct the past as it exactly was. Moreover, where the past has left no traces that endured into the present, its history is truly irrecoverable. But to say that the past is wholly inaccessible as blatantly as that is highly reprehensible; it is an affront to the professional integrity of the historian, as it seeks to degrade his work. In relation to the adoption of statistical and sociological formulations, it must be stated that in some cases, these cannot, but not 'can never', be used owing to several considerations. The first and most obvious of these factors is the lack of general agreement on the part of historians and other scholars regarding the appropriateness of their use in historical reconstruction due, primarily, to the nature of the historical enterprise. To the postmodernists' accusations, it should be emphasised that the exquisite modern awareness of the relativity of all things vindicates the tentative claims of history because this element renders anyone powerless to believe in the truth of anything. Whatever the case may be, these misunderstandings, distrusts and onslaughts have made a significant contribution to the decline of history.

#### *A Disturbing and a Dangerous Discipline*

Some people regard history as an unnecessarily disturbing and dangerous tool for society. They define history in a way that, at face value, portrays the discipline as one that disturbs the happiness of nations and peoples, giving birth to the old proverb: "happy is the country which has no history".<sup>38</sup> This assertion creates the impression that societies that have history are almost always in a state of instability. It should be noted, however, that the term *history*, as used in this proverb, does not refer to the significant past or experience itself; nor does it refer to the study of history as a subject. The proverb rather implies that such nations and peoples avoid the wars, rebellions, etc., that form so much of human history.<sup>39</sup> It is however, unfortunate because it is not everyone who may understand the deeper meaning and implication of this proverb, and, thus, distinguish the history implied here from history proper. To the layman who understands history to mean just the past, this proverb would carry only one meaning: that history is an enemy of national and human happiness because of the chaos that wars, uprisings, etc. often wrought on society. However, if indeed some people and places did not have history, in the sense of past experiences, then they definitely would have belonged to the most underprivileged classes among humanity, since a country without history is a country of mad citizens.<sup>40</sup> It is even instructive to note that it is rather people and countries who do not have history that are unhappy. As the former British Prime Minister, William E. Gladstone, maintains, "Unhappy are the people who cut themselves from their past."<sup>41</sup>

Alan Moore believes that "our past, as is gone, can never injure us anymore unless we ourselves empower it to do so."<sup>42</sup> This means that the past in itself could not act in any destructive way towards the present until the present itself energises the past to do so. To this extent, it would be unacceptable for one to talk of an 'oppressive past'. However, some people are of the view that history could be very dangerous. It has been asserted that all modern wars start in the history classroom.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, an ill-told and ill-applied history could be very dangerous to humanity; it could, of course, lead to the resurgence of old rivalries or conflicts. Recasting the past could fondle sore spots. Since some history

<sup>38</sup> John Simpson and Jennifer Speake, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*, Third Edition (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 53.

<sup>39</sup> Ivor H. Evans, *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase & Fable* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993), 509.

<sup>40</sup> This statement is attributed to George Santayana. It is cited in Ferenc M. Szasz, "Historical Quotations", *History News Network* (2005), Date Accessed June 7, 2019, <http://hnn.us/articles/1328.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Addo-Fening, *Abrewa Nana: A Trajectory of Life, An Autobiography* (Tema: Digibooks Ghana Ltd., 2018), ix.

<sup>42</sup> "Quotes about History", Date Accessed July 29, 2019, <http://homepage.eircom.net/~odyssey/Quotes/History/Historians.html>.

<sup>43</sup> "Quotes about History",

books reconstruct events of bitter experiences in the past, history could cause great emotional trauma, as people who were in some ways affected by an old event would be reminded of their pains through a re-enactment of that event. As noted above, some authors intentionally misrepresent events in their reconstruction of the past in an attempt to achieve some targeted objectives, and in a situation where the historian has a broader readership, the impact may be grave. This explains why historians are often considered in some quarters as the leading fomenters of conflicts of the current age.<sup>44</sup> Apart from distortion or misrepresentation of facts which normally leads to conflicts, there are instances where historians, bearing in mind their scientific obligations, present objective representations of past events, tread genuine courses, and reveal hidden facts, but the exposure of such facts may lead to conflicts. For instance, the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade left bitter feelings in the hearts of most Africans, particularly those whose direct relatives were taken away. As some of such Africans lived their lives in sorrow and pain, a flashback on the cruelty of the trade could easily excite hatred in their hearts towards Europeans and Americans for their callous treatment of Africans in this heinous trade. An objective analysis of historical events such as inter-ethnic conflicts, wars and subjugation of one ethnic group by another and the enmity that existed between different groups, could develop negative tendencies in students and readers of history and generate social chaos and political instability. It could develop animosity in some students towards others. Such developments do not provide conducive conditions for co-habitation and healthy inter-personal and inter-group relationships, and since some historians are still willing to lend their pens to the promotion of ethnicity and tribalism, there could never be a shortage of conflicts of diverse forms. Genuinely, history in itself is not as dangerous as some people think of it. Yet, because of some of the unfortunate issues mentioned here, some people maintain that historical events should be treated as dead and gone forever and, therefore, of no value. Such people also consider the study of history as a useless pursuit.

#### *A Dead and Useless Subject*

Derek Heather has observed that to many of the modern generations, history, like God, is dead.<sup>45</sup> Lord Chesterfield has also stressed that history is a useless heap of facts.<sup>46</sup> Generally, many people look down upon history as both an archaic and a dead subject and, as a result, uninteresting and irrelevant to modern needs. There are also the various reductive interpretations that have been offered according to which belief in the contemporary usefulness of history is a purely fanatic or nostalgic attachment to the past by people who believe that their value in the present world could be measured solely in terms of past glories or references to the past. This devaluation of history has gone to the extent where some people have made concerted efforts to deny history of any contemporary relevance on the grounds that contemporary issues could never be evaluated in terms of those of past experiences. They argue that the minds of people of the past worked differently from those of the present. In support of this view, Arthur O. Lovejoy has argued that it is unlikely for the present to obtain any benefits from the mental processes of people of the past to assist in the solution of our present problems.<sup>47</sup> Such people often argue ardently that the present is so radically removed from the past that there is nothing to learn from former generations or previous ages.

To others, the *uselessness* of history does not lie in the difference between the past and the present and future but in the fact that experience itself shows the inconsequence of history. Some of the seventeenth-century *anti-history* individuals and groups regarded history as useless on the assumption that Adam, the first man, had neither had nor needed any history.<sup>48</sup> To others, the past, as

<sup>44</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution* (Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007), 298.

<sup>45</sup> The Quote Garden, "Quotations about History", Date Accessed June 7, 2019, <http://www.quote garden.com/history.html>.

<sup>46</sup> "Quotes About History", *History News Network* (December, 2005), Date Accessed on June 7, 2019, <http://hnn.us/articles/1328.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Present Standpoints and Past History", in Hans Meyerhoff, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*, Anchor Books Edition (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 180.

<sup>48</sup> Palmer and Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 277.

is gone, should be treated with indifference. There is the view that humans need not chase after the past because what is past is left behind. The assumed *uselessness* and *deadness* of the past and history are perfectly exemplified in an answer given by a Turkish official to an Englishman's question:

The thing you asked of me is both difficult and useless. Although I have passed all my days in this place, I have neither counted the houses nor have I inquired into the number of inhabitants; and as to what one person loads on his mules and the other stows away in the bottom of his ship, that is no business of mine. But, above all, as to the previous history of this city, God only knows the amount of dirt and confusion that the infidels may have eaten before the coming of the sword of Islam. It were unprofitable for us to inquire into it.<sup>49</sup>

It is clear from the statement that the Turkish official did not see the need to gather any historical knowledge about the people with whom he lived at that particular time. To him, it was useless to inquire into the history of the people, particularly as he thought, it was not his 'business'. Unsurprisingly, there are some, and really many, people today who also assume that studying history means studying about dead people which is of no significance.<sup>50</sup>

However, it would be highly illogical and, in fact, suicidal to adopt an indifferent attitude towards what happened to others in the past in this era of globalisation because humans are either directly or indirectly affected by those past events, irrespective of where and when they occurred. Every period in the flow of history enters into a relationship with every other age. Just as it occurs at present, in the past, the failure of the harvest, changes in the terms of trade, or new political alignments, in one region of the world, frequently had repercussions on the other side of the globe. Similarly, new technological developments designed to solve a specific problem in one country could lead to an improved standard of living throughout the world. Knowing the history of other countries could even help to foster better relationships when, for example, it comes to participating in world events. Unfortunately, however, those who are ignorant of these important issues regard history as an obstacle to present and future progress and, hence, wish that history could be expunged from the school curriculum.

### *An obstacle to Present and Future Progress*

Steven Spielberg has observed that today's youth tend to live in the present and work for the future, and to be totally ignorant of the past.<sup>51</sup> For instance, James Kirby Martin and his associates have observed that Americans are optimistic, forward-looking people who, in the course of everyday life, care little about the past.<sup>52</sup> This confirms the view that at present, many people do not want to learn or hear anything at all about the past and its history, which is more capable than any other discipline in providing them with knowledge of their present positions and circumstances. Certainly, there are times when historical reflections could be detrimental by way of obstructing vision and plan towards future progress, in which situation abandoning history becomes the only solution to the problem. However, this policy of 'throwing away the entire past to make way for progress' usually makes it much more difficult for people to learn from the enduring lessons of history and appreciate the patterns that inevitably show up.

Another undesirable consequence of this philosophy is the hatred people develop towards history and all representations of the past because of their ardent belief in the view that the past acts as an obstacle to their present and future aspirations. These people normally adopt an attitude of impatience and hostility towards the many signs of the continuing power of the past, including

---

<sup>49</sup> Barzun and Graff, *The Modern Researcher*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Ms. Janet Sonia Brown, Aged 24 years, Final Year History (Single Major) Student, University of Cape Coast, October 16, 2018, Cape Coast.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Jay, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*, Third Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 377.

<sup>52</sup> James Kirby Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples: A Mosaic in the Making*, Fifth Edition (New York et al.: Pearson and Longman, 2004), xxv.

institutions, social practices, literary forms, religious doctrines, etc. They consider all carry-overs from earlier ages to be wholly irrelevant obstructions to the fresh creative task of building a prosperous future. The constant principle that runs through their arguments is *the present generation*, and the principle of judgement is *the sovereignty of the living*.<sup>53</sup> They strongly maintain that God made the Earth for the living and not for the dead. With such convictions, they argue that everything associated with the past should be burned away. Sometimes, the urge to root out vestiges of the culture and society of the past becomes so intense that destruction becomes the inevitable consequence. This was exactly what happened in Europe during the Age of Enlightenment. Sharing the current view of the past as benighted; the typical enlightened despots were impatient of custom and of all that was imbedded in custom or claimed as a heritage from the past, such as systems of customary law and the rights and privileges of the church, the nobles, towns, guilds, provinces, assemblies of estates, or, in France, the judicial bodies called parliaments.<sup>54</sup> People who upheld tradition even became enemies and targets of systematic assassination.

It is conceded that some past societal conventions, customs and traditions, particularly unfounded ones, act as stumbling blocks to present and future progress. Essentially, such inheritances need to be abandoned in favour of contemporary scientific and technological advancement and socio-economic development. However, to consider the entire past as wholly irrelevant could have detrimental effects. One inevitable result of such views is what may be described as cultural extinction – the loss of some important elements of culture. It could also lead to the conviction that plans and decisions in private lives and national programmes and policies should not be projected into the future since these would not be useful in the future if every generation were to mould its own life as it deemed fit. Such conceptions may, in turn, cause periodic administrative chaos because government officials may be influenced to formulate legislation which does not endure longer. In whatever way the assumption that attachment to the past impedes present and future progress is interpreted, there is a need to appreciate that it has implications for the decline of interest in the study of history.

## **B. The Historical Deeds**

### *The Voluminous and Abstract Nature of History, and the Structure of the History Syllabus*

The fact that some students and general readers are averse to reading big books or lengthy and more detailed works points to another reason why some students prefer reading other disciplines to reading history because of the demanding or voluminous nature of the topics to be treated and their inability to obtain good grades in spite of the considerable investments they make in studying history. Genuinely, some students have problems with the *voluminous nature* of history. Of course, each discipline keeps growing and accumulating more and more materials to add to the already existing materials. This means that the scope of each discipline widens as an attempt is made to move from the past to the present and into the future. As everything that is done today – in the present – falls into the ambit of the past, as soon as the present becomes the past and the future becomes the present, history tends to record more events and accumulates more materials and topics in addition to the already existing one. This continuous recording and accumulation of more events make history a special discipline in the sense that over time it places *a burden* on historians and history students as it gives them more issues and topics to study. Interestingly, during an orientation programme organised on September 16, 2019, by the Department of History for First Year History students of the University of Cape Coast, one of the students did not hide his frustration for being a history student. He openly confessed, “I’m praying that time moves a little faster for me to reach Level 300 where I will have the opportunity to drop history because, with my experience from Senior High School, I know that history notes are plenty.” This shows that some students do not like to read history simply because of the volume of topics history students have to study. Indeed, in many countries, students and teachers alike complain about the voluminous nature of the history curriculum. History teachers and students are

<sup>53</sup> R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 16.

<sup>54</sup> Palmer and Colton, *A History of the Modern World*, 301.

expected to treat too many topics within a relatively short academic year. This naturally puts pressure on both teachers and students. The sad aspect is that many teachers and students are often not able to complete the syllabus before students write their examinations. Meanwhile, the examination bodies do not consider this challenge, and set questions on all topics for students to answer. This, evidently, is one of the causes of history students' inability to obtain good grades in examinations.

What even worsens the case and scares some students away from history is the abstract nature of the topic's history concerns itself with. Indeed, the subject-matter of history is basically the past, which is often far removed from the present and, thus, appears more abstract and difficult for some students to understand. During the fieldwork, a history teacher admitted that "History is not like the natural sciences where practicals are done in the laboratory; the subject is more abstract in nature."<sup>55</sup> The abstract nature of history is partly because the past which history concerns itself is gone forever and can never be brought back to direct view and immediate observation, implying that one can never know with certainty what the past was like. This makes the learning of history difficult for some students, especially those who do not have a sharp sense of imagination to observe past events.<sup>56</sup>

The way topics in history syllabi are organised also compounds the situation.<sup>57</sup> The Ghana Senior High School History syllabus perfectly illustrates this point. The topics in this syllabus have been broadly organised into the Landmarks of African History up to 1800 (for First Year or Form One students; the Cultures and Civilisations of Ghana from Earliest Times to A.D. 1700 (for Second Year or Form Two students); and the History of Ghana and Her Relations with the Wider World from A.D. 1500 to the Present (for Third Year or Form Three students). The specific topics under the Landmarks of African History are History as a Subject (Introduction to African History); African Pre-history from the Earliest Times to 500 B.C.; Civilisation of Pharaonic Egypt from 3000 B.C.; Civilisation of Axum and Ancient Ethiopia; Civilisation of North Africa; Origin and Spread of the Bantu Civilisation; Swahili Civilisation of the East African Coast; Civilisation of the West African Sudan from 500 B.C.; and Civilisation and Cultures of the West African Forest and Coast. Under the Cultures and Civilisations of Ghana from Earliest Times to A.D. 1700, the topics treated are Introduction to the History of Ghana; Pre-history of Ghana, 50,000 B.C. to A.D. 700; The Peopling of Ghana; Social and Political Organisations; History of Medicine; History of the Economy of Ghana; the Rise of States and Kingdoms; History of Art and Technology; and the Coming of the Europeans. Finally, the topics treated under the History of Ghana and Her Relations with the Wider World from A.D. 1500 to the Present are Social and Political Developments, 1500–1900; Social, Economic and Political Developments in Ghana, 1900–1957; Independence and After: the Nkrumah Era; Ghana after the Nkrumah Era, 1966–1991; and Ghana in the Comity of Nations.<sup>58</sup>

Undoubtedly, the arrangement of the topics in the Ghana Senior High School History syllabus from the remote or ancient past to the contemporary period has largely been influenced by respect for chronology, which has, in turn, determined the adoption of the perspective approach of teaching – from the unknown past to the known present. This means that Form One students, whose minds are relatively fragile and not strong enough to comprehend abstract topics and concepts, are unfortunately exposed to such topics as African Pre-history and the ancient civilisations of Africa which require a lot of abstract thinking. Even some experienced history teachers sometimes find it more difficult to understand and teach these topics in ways that would help their students to understand them better. If some teachers who are adults have challenges with these abstract topics, then what would be the situation of Form One students, many of whom are often not above 18 years? In addition, many

---

<sup>55</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mrs. Janet Nsowah Somuah, Aged 32 years, History Tutor at Mpraeso Senior High School, Mpraeso-Kwahu, March 19, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Ms. Joana Nyame, Aged 25 years, Final Year (Level 400) Anthropology (and Former History) Student, University of Cape Coast, August 29, 2019, Cape Coast.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mr. Samuel Appiah Dwumfour, Aged 30 years, History Tutor at Maame Krobo Community Day Senior High School, Kwahu Afram Plains South District, and First Year M.Ed. (History) Sandwich Student of University of Cape Coast, July 6, 2019, Cape Coast.

<sup>58</sup> J.K. Fynn, R. Addo-Fening and J. Anquandah, eds., *History for Senior Secondary Schools*, Reprinted (Accra: Ministry of Education, and London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1993), i–ii.

teachers have nothing concrete to rely on for teaching these abstract topics. This problem slows down the thinking of students and makes them lose interest in the study of history right from the beginning of their encounter with the subject.

### *Unrefined Teaching Methodology*

The perspective method of teaching, as has been emphasised above, has been influenced mainly by the chronological arrangement of the topics in most history syllabuses and textbooks. This method of teaching history has not helped contemporary societies to reap the desired dividends from the investment in history education, as it has contributed largely to some students' loss of interest in the study of history because it does not allow young students to be exposed to topics they are familiar with but rather to issues they are unfamiliar with and find difficult to understand. This problem is often aggravated by the methodology some teachers use in their teaching of history. In fact, some students who abandon history in favour of other disciplines usually mention having challenges with the methodological approaches some teachers adopt in their teaching and the nature of questions they ask in examinations. M.B.E. Crookall has identified four main inappropriate approaches which some teachers adopt in teaching history and, thus, contribute to killing students' interest in the subject. One is the *reading round the class* method where the teacher gives the history textbook to students and asks them to read one after another, while he sits down and does something different in the classroom. Another is the *note-taking* approach whereby the teacher always goes to the classroom and writes notes on the board for students to copy. The third is the *silent reading* method where the teacher asks the students to pick their history textbooks or pamphlets and read silently. The fourth is the *lecture* method.<sup>59</sup> Nsowah Somuah, who had observed the teaching approaches of some colleague history teachers, confirmed Crookall's assertion. She argued that "The approach which some teachers use in teaching the subject is not the best. The subject is abstract; therefore, if teachers use the lecture method alone in the teaching process, it makes it boring."<sup>60</sup> Another respondent stressed that many students fear, and are not interested in, history because of the methodology some teachers adopt in their teaching.<sup>61</sup> Many history teachers teach the subject without enough use of ICT and other tools that could make history more relevant to the lives of the students. Thus, even though history could be fun, some teachers make many students suffer during history classes because of the abstract manner in which they present their lessons.

Liam Fay has also rightly indicated that history classes can be a nightmare for some students because all too often, the subject is reduced, by uninspiring teachers, to tedious dates, names, facts and figures.<sup>62</sup> In a study they conducted in Senior High Schools in Ghana, Cosmas Cobbold and Charles Adabo Opong found that history assessment usually consisted of using tests that measured memorisation and repetition.<sup>63</sup> To some people, particularly students, therefore, the study of history involves much work, comprising a good deal of dull memorisation of dates, names and locations of historical events and the names of rulers and the periods of their reigns in the past.<sup>64</sup> T. Holt affirms this *accusation* through a conversation he had with history students who indicated that they viewed history as a story which needed to be memorised to pass examinations.<sup>65</sup> In other words, history is a story with a predetermined plot to be memorised but not interpreted. D. Shemilt agrees and notes that

<sup>59</sup> M.B.E. Crookall, *Handbook for History Teachers in West Africa* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1960), 55–56.

<sup>60</sup> WhatsApp communication with Nsowah Somuah.

<sup>61</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Francis Acheampong, Aged 35 years, History Tutor at KEEA Senior High School, Elmina, July 4, 2018.

<sup>62</sup> Liam Fay's assertion is cited in "Quotes about History".

<sup>63</sup> Cosmas Cobbold and Charles Adabo Opong, "Re-Echoing the Place of History in the School Curriculum", *International Journal of Education Leadership*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2010), 90.

<sup>64</sup> Interviews with Joana Nyame; Ms. Loretta Asare Darkoa, Aged 25 years, Final Year (Level 400) Religious and Human Values (and Former History) Student, University of Cape Coast, May 25, 2018, Cape Coast.

<sup>65</sup> T. Holt, *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination and Understanding* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1999), 33.

constructivist research into students' historical thinking suggests that students perceive the learning of history to be the presentation of a uniform picture of the past.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, the problem of memorisation of historical facts is traceable to the past. Indeed, one of the reasons why history was considered more important in the past in some societies was the belief that knowledge of certain historical facts helped distinguish the educated person from the uneducated.<sup>67</sup> It was assumed in many societies that the person who could recite the dates of significant past events or the names of important historical figures and developments was superior to those who could not do so. Such a person was regarded as a better candidate for Law School or even a business promotion. In colonial territories, history was employed as propaganda machinery by the imperialists and colonial administrators to justify and perpetuate the evils of colonial domination. In their attempts to indoctrinate and assimilate the African youth, the colonial educational authorities in Africa forced pupils and students to learn about the names of monarchs, conquerors, places, mountains, rivers, etc. in Europe.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in colonial Ghana, for example, there was an undue reliance on the memorisation of historical facts, which had nothing really to do with the country and its development. For example, in its 1948 report, the Watson Commission lamented:

We ourselves observed among the younger people a tendency to repetition and a lack of critical thought. This is a menace to the pupils themselves as well as to the community, for a literate man so educated is susceptible to propaganda and rumour of the crudest absurdity.<sup>69</sup>

Since the current educational system in most African countries was inherited from the colonial system, this unwholesome tradition has been considerably maintained so that the habit is still evident even in the twenty-first century. Some teachers, not only at the basic and senior high school levels of education but also in universities and colleges, still emphasise the recounting of names and memorisation of dates of the past more than the critical analysis and interpretation of data and the drawing of significant lessons from the woven material. This is evidenced by the questions examination boards, such as WAEC, and university teachers usually set for students, asking them to provide the specific dates and names of characters of historical phenomena. A respondent stated during an interview session that he would have become a good historian, but he ran away from the history class because he could not memorise the dates and names of historical events and persons during his elementary school days in the 1980s.<sup>70</sup> This shows that during his school days, emphasis was placed on dates and names of past events and personalities which necessarily encouraged memorisation. This has made many students regard history as a matter of acquiring information, an important factor which encourages mindless memorisation on the part of some students without necessarily understanding the facts. This rather unfortunate practice has led to the description of history as 'the recital of facts represented as true', thereby establishing the view that history is the most difficult of all the sciences. Neil McLynn describes high school World History in Japan as "... the formidable barrier of names and dates from which university entrance examinations are constructed." The consequence is "... that many undergraduates cherish an instinctive, and understandable, aversion to all things historical ...."<sup>71</sup>

It is clear that knowledge of historical facts has, over the years, been considered enough justification for the study of history. Unfortunately, but realistically, this reason cannot be

---

<sup>66</sup> D. Shemilt, "The Caliph's Coin: The Currency of Narrative Frameworks in History Teaching", in P.N. Stearns, P. Seixas and S. Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 95.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mr. Eric Sakyi Nketiah, Aged 43 years, Senior Lecturer and the Head of the Department of History Education, University of Education, Winneba, June 21, 2019, Winneba.

<sup>68</sup> Adjepong, "The Image of Pre-colonial Africa in European Circles", 15–37.

<sup>69</sup> Colonial Office, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast 1948* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948), 65.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Dr. Martin Q. Amlor, Aged 55 years, Senior Lecturer at the Centre for African and International Studies, University of Cape Coast, May 14, 2015, Cape Coast.

<sup>71</sup> Neil McLynn, "Personal Perspectives: A View from Japan", in Andrew Erskine, ed., *A Companion to Ancient History* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009), 8.

accommodated and justified in the contemporary world because the mere memorisation of dates and names of the past has no bearing whatsoever on the lives of contemporary peoples and societies. Genuinely, names of historical figures, and dates and places of historical events give specific identity to the people and the events concerned, so that these historical figures and events are, all things being equal, not mistaken for others. However, no living being today can ever be, for example, like Osei Tutu I, Yaa Asantewaa, Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln, or Winston Churchill. Meanwhile, as humans, one may find himself or herself in circumstances similar to those in which the predecessors found themselves and, thus, thought and acted. It is, therefore, more crucial to know what happened to people or what people did in the past, why they thought the way they did, why and how they acted the way they did, and what resulted from their thoughts and actions. In the same way, it can be decided to give the names of past events to those of today, but no event today can ever bear the same name and features as those of past phenomena. They can only share certain similarities; at least, all events have causes, conditions and consequences – the three C's of historical events. More importantly, the names, dates and places or theatres of historical events cannot in any way give any concrete scientific knowledge about events of today. They can, however, give a perspective in which to examine present occurrences. It is, accordingly, essential to know the context in which historical events occur rather than their names, dates and places of their occurrence.

In fact, the mere memorisation of the facts of history does not make any meaningful contribution to the development of contemporary society. Certainly, if the purpose of historical studies were to fill individuals with dates of great battles, births and death of kings, and theatres of historical events, it would have been highly difficult to justify the practice of historical science today. The reason is that such an endeavour does not encourage students to think critically and make inferences from different but related situations. As Michael Woolcock, Simon Szreter and Vijayendra Rao have shown, history is not just a matter of recounting dates and events but 'acquiring the entire sensibility about how to compile, assess and interpret evidence, substantiate causal claims, and understand complex (often independent) processes'.<sup>72</sup> A historical study which does not challenge students and readers to think critically is, of course, poor stuff. Essentially, handling the discipline in such poor ways only tends to encourage students' estimation of history as dry, tedious and learning towards obscurantism,<sup>73</sup> and make many people think that history is a science of a misplaced subject matter. This perception often leads students to make poorly informed choices about Senior High School subjects, sometimes rejecting history because they are not clear about whether or not history would gain them a good tertiary entrance score or a lucrative job. Many people think that it is the responsibility of history teachers to help dispel the misconceptions some history students have about the discipline. The problem, however, is that some schools do not have well-trained history teachers to teach the subject and help history students to discard these fallacies. In effect, the problem of inadequate professional history teachers has also contributed to the decline of students' interest in history and a general lack of respect for the usable cultural past.

#### *Lack of Qualified Teachers and Inadequate Teaching and Learning Resources*

The issue of inadequate qualified teachers, especially in Africa, is a major factor affecting the teaching and learning of some disciplines in some schools. In the case of history, the situation in some Departments of History in universities in Ghana today paints a clearer picture. In the 2000/2001 academic year, for example, the Department of History at the University of Ghana had very few lecturers and supervisors. As a result, the applications of candidates who wanted to be considered for the Master of Philosophy in History programme in that department were turned down.<sup>74</sup> Until 2013,

<sup>72</sup> Michael Woolcock, Simon Szreter and Vijayendra Rao, "How and Why Does History Matter for Development Policy?", *Journal of Development Studies*, 47 (1), (2011), 72.

<sup>73</sup> Jurgen Herbst, "The Teacher of History", in Ernest Stabler, ed., *The Education of the Secondary School Teacher* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 155.

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin N.E. Donkor, "Rehabilitating the Image of History in Ghana", in James Martin Weiler, ed., *Social Sciences Today: A Collection of Writings on Current Issues in Social Science* (Winneba: Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Education, Winneba, 2009), 77.

the University of Education, Winneba, also did not have a Department of History altogether partly because of a lack of lecturers. As of 2010, there were only two permanent history lecturers and a retired professor. Since the three lecturers alone could not handle all the history courses the University mounted, part-time lecturers had to be recruited from other universities, particularly from the University of Cape Coast, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, and the University of Ghana, to assist in teaching.<sup>75</sup> The result was that history and other disciplines which were also suffering from the same problem were lumped together in the Department of Social Sciences Education, which was established in 2005. In 1996, Andre Odendaal highlighted a similar situation in South Africa when a study he undertook revealed that there were only ten black historians in the whole of the country who possessed doctoral qualifications.<sup>76</sup>

In the early 1980s, Lloyd Bromberg, an assistant director of the New York City Board of Education, reported that many High School social studies teachers had no background in history, although history had been placed under social studies and, thus, required teachers to be well-grounded in history.<sup>77</sup> Bromberg stated emphatically that New York was one of the states in the USA that offered a “generic” social studies certificate, which meant that a person could be certified to teach social studies without ever studying history at college.<sup>78</sup> What is more surprising and appalling about the American situation is that not only were students ignorant of some historical details, but the very teachers who taught them also exhibited gross ignorance about some historical facts. When Ravitch asked teachers about the major obstacles to teaching history, some of them frequently complained about their students’ poor reading skills, which interfered with their ability to comprehend written assignments. Surprisingly, however, one teacher in a New York City High School said that her ninth-grade students in “Global Studies” would read “Socrates was tired” and “Aristotle tortured Alexander the Great” when the text actually said “Socrates was tried” and “Aristotle tutored Alexander the Great” respectively.<sup>79</sup> To find an excuse for this, the teacher quickly remarked that with those two sentences “the entire course of Western history is changed.”<sup>80</sup>

In fact, during the fieldwork, the authors found the problem of inadequate trained or professional personnel or the use of unqualified personnel to teach history as a particularly significant cause identified by several respondents. A trained history teacher, who was not happy about the practice of allowing people with backgrounds in other disciplines to teach history at the Senior High School level, queried seriously, “One cannot teach mathematics if one has not been trained in mathematics, so why do school authorities allow people with backgrounds in geography, social studies, economics, religious studies, languages, etc., to teach history?”<sup>81</sup> She added, “I know some teachers who are currently teaching the subject but were never trained as history teachers.” Another history teacher stated that “Very few teachers are up-to-date with the subject matter of history.”<sup>82</sup> Yet other respondents argued that “Most history teachers lack pedagogical content knowledge of the teaching and learning of history as a subject.”<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Adjei Adjepong and Charles Adabo Opong were two of the three part-time lecturers recruited from University of Cape Coast. They taught a number of History courses in the Department of Social Sciences Education at UEW from October 2010 to May 2013. By the latter date, the University (UEW) had recruited some permanent History lecturers who could handle all the courses run by the Department.

<sup>76</sup> Nuttal and Wright, “Predicaments of Academic History”, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Ravitch, “Decline and Fall of Teaching History”, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Ravitch, “Decline and Fall of Teaching History”, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ravitch, “Decline and Fall of Teaching History”, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Ravitch, “Decline and Fall of Teaching History”, 4.

<sup>81</sup> WhatsApp communication with Nsowah Somuah.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Mr. Venacious Dunee, Aged 38 years, History Tutor at Mim Senior High School, and First Year M.Ed. (History) Sandwich Student, University of Cape Coast, July 6, 2019, Cape Coast.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews with Mr. George Swaniker, Aged 39 years, History and Social Studies Tutor at Otumfuo Osei Tutu II College, Tetrem, and First Year M.Phil. (Social Studies) Sandwich Student, University of Cape Coast, July 6, 2019, Cape Coast; Ms. Christiana Bainsan, Aged 39 years, Social Studies Tutor at Adjetey Ansah Junior High School, Tema, and First Year M.Phil. (Social Studies) Sandwich Student, University of Cape Coast, July 6, 2019, Cape Coast.

In some cases, well-trained historians refuse to accept teaching appointments and take up appointments in other establishments because they consider teaching history as unattractive in the face of lucrative jobs in government and business, where there are several and rapid opportunities for personal advancement.<sup>84</sup> This shows that the increased demand for historians in other sectors of the economy partly accounts for the shortage of qualified history teachers to teach the subject in schools. This development has a positive dimension: the fact that some areas other than teaching absorb history graduates is a manifestation of the fact that the discipline has practical uses and is, therefore, relevant to the job market. It implies, however, that some graduates with good degrees in history go to places where historical knowledge is applied in a different way other than in teaching. Normally in universities and colleges, history teachers try to identify students who have the potential to become brilliant researchers and teachers of history and provide them with special tutelage and treatment. Unfortunately, not all these talented history students graduate to become history teachers. The dearth of adequate and qualified history teachers puts pressure on heads of educational institutions which sometimes results in their picking of people who drifted into teaching because they either had no qualification for anything else or had failed in realising their dreams elsewhere. Such teachers do not teach history in a way that would help students to know and understand the relevance of history as a subject.<sup>85</sup>

Added to the problem of inadequate professional history teachers is the lack of teaching and learning resources in some schools, particularly in Africa. It is generally acknowledged that a lack of adequate and appropriate teaching and learning resources often has an adverse impact on enrolment and students' performance. Indeed, many respondents blamed the decline of students' interest in history and the popularity of the discipline on the total lack, or inadequacy, of teaching and learning materials in many schools, especially those located in rural and deprived areas. "Teachers and students lack the necessary documents and materials for teaching and learning", one respondent emphasised.<sup>86</sup> "The issue of lack of materials for students studying history makes it difficult for students to complete their assignments and pass well in their examinations", another respondent stated.<sup>87</sup> Other respondents maintained that at the university level, some lazy lecturers use the same lecture notes, and the same course outlines, with the same references to teach several batches of students without revising and upgrading the notes. "How can we produce dynamic and smart graduates with archaic learning materials?", one respondent questioned.<sup>88</sup>

Genuinely, many schools in Africa suffer from the virtual absence of the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the teaching of history. The use of interactive animations, graphics, and virtual reality applications and even the production of CR-Roms for teaching, as is done in other subjects, is not seen in the teaching and learning of history in some schools and universities. The availability and reliability of historical sources have also been one of the frustrating problems in historical research. Archival research is becoming more and more frustrating as documents deteriorate at an alarming rate. This leaves serious information gaps which affect historical research and writing. Efforts by the Public Records and Archives Administration (PRAAD) to save endangered documents and other archival materials get little support due to dwindling government budgetary allocation.<sup>89</sup> All these factors have worked to discourage many students from pursuing history. As one respondent maintained, the failure by educational authorities to provide basic teaching and learning materials, excavation tools or equipment for archaeological research, and date-

---

<sup>84</sup> Nuttal and Wright, "Predicaments of Academic History", 3.

<sup>85</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Farouk Boadan, Aged 29 years, History Tutor at Akumfi Ameyaw Senior High School, Techiman, Bono East Region, February 27, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> WhatsApp communication with Nsowah Somuah.

<sup>87</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mrs. Theresa Oduro, Aged 28 years, History Graduate (2015), March 6, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> WhatsApp communication with Ms. Mary Asabea, Aged 32 years, History Graduate (M.Phil.) and Third Year LLB Student at University of Ghana, March 24, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Prof. Kwabena Adu-Boahen, Aged 59 years, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, October 25, 2013, Accra.

checking devices, coupled with a lack of practicals in the study of history, have made students lose interest in the study of history.<sup>90</sup>

### *Official Government Policy and the Activities of School Authorities*

Some governments and school authorities have also contributed much to the decline of the popularity of history as they have increasingly treated history with disdain. Indeed, the policy of some governments to subjugate history under the hegemony of other subjects has contributed enormously to the rapid decline of the popularity of the subject. In Ghana, for instance, the study of history has experienced a substantial degree of marginalisation in the educational curriculum since 1987 when the Middle School system was abolished.<sup>91</sup> With this abolition, history was no longer studied as a separate subject; rather, the educational reforms of that year placed history under social studies. Also, in South Africa, in the early 1990s, anti-apartheid academic historians expected that history would feature prominently in the post-apartheid school curriculum. Fortunately for them, the outcomes-based national education policy which was launched in 1996 made a provision for this. However, in Curriculum 2005, history lost its distinctive place in the curriculum and was placed under a new subject known as the human and social sciences, and arts and culture.<sup>92</sup>

Outside Africa, the same phenomenon exists in countries like Australia, Britain and the USA. In Australia, a study of educational trends from the mid-1960s shows that the systematic study of history as a rigorous discipline began to disappear from many schools during the 1970s.<sup>93</sup> Reportedly, this occurred at the instigation of UNESCO, and history was replaced by social studies. While many private schools have retained history departments in Australia, most government schools have now subsumed history, geography and political issues under a vague subject called the study of society and environment (SOSE). In Britain, a major reason for more students aged 14–16 years not reading history is the requirement to study English, mathematics, science, religious studies, citizenship and ICT up to school-leaving age, while history is optional.<sup>94</sup> In the USA, too, at the High School level, history requirements have increasingly been replaced by courses in social studies.<sup>95</sup> In the late 1960s, the New York State decided to de-emphasise chronological history and to focus rather on topical issues and social science concepts.<sup>96</sup> A teacher in one New York City High School explained that their school stopped teaching history immediately after the State had taken that decision particularly because history did not help their students to pass the New York State Regents' examinations in social studies.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, social studies was not clearly defined. As a result, teachers hardly agreed on what they should teach and what their students should learn. To some teachers, social studies meant the study of social science subjects, including sociology, economics, psychology and anthropology. Some teachers regarded social studies as a field whose purpose was to teach good behaviour and good citizenship, while others considered it as a field concerned with energy education, environmental education, gun-control education, future studies, consumer education, free-enterprise education and other courses prompted by current issues.<sup>98</sup>

Apart from all these attempts at deposing history from its privileged position in the school curriculum, governments also tend to sideline historians in dealing with national issues. Folasade O. Ifamose has lamented that despite the importance of history to nation-building, African governments

<sup>90</sup> WhatsApp communication with Selorm Kwabla Atisu, Aged 30 years, History Graduate (2015), April 1, 2019.

<sup>91</sup> D.A. Dwarko, "History – The Ailing Subject: The Need for Revival in the 21st Century", in D.E.K. Amenumey, ed., *Challenges of Education in Ghana in the 21st Century* (Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007), 170.

<sup>92</sup> Nuttal and Wright, "Predicaments of Academic History", 9.

<sup>93</sup> "The Author Speaks about the Importance of Studying History", Date Accessed April 10, 2019, <http://www.pacificwar.org.au/AboutAuthor/StudyingHistory.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Evans, "Make History Compulsory for the Right Reasons".

<sup>95</sup> Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples*, xxiv.

<sup>96</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History", 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History", 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History", 3.

are putting pressure on historians to justify their place in the universities.<sup>99</sup> When committees or commissions are set up to discuss matters of national significance, it is often observed that historians are absent on these bodies. For instance, in South Africa, academic historians were hardly involved in the development of Curriculum 2005; it was later after the policy had formally been launched that the South African Historical Society sent a delegation to the Minister of Education in protest against the marginalisation of historians.<sup>100</sup> In the case of Nigeria, although other professional organisations, such as the Nigerian Bar Association, had representation at the 2006 National Political Reform Conference, which, for the first time since independence, brought together Nigerians to discuss and proffer solutions to their problems, there was no historian as a government nominee.<sup>101</sup>

One major reason accounting for this official or national lukewarm attitude towards history, or attempts to *murder* the discipline all together, is that many governments of today believe that any massive investment in education and training should yield tangible results. Governments usually believe that education is practical, applied and learning how to make the world work, and since history is considered not to produce any immediate material uses, it is argued that investment in its study would be a waste of scarce resources. They, therefore, argue that history should not be accorded enough space in even textbooks on subjects in which history is made a subsidiary. Nuttall and Wright maintain that several academic historians in South Africa made determined efforts to be members of school textbook author teams, with the view to influencing the new materials for the new generation.<sup>102</sup> However, the influential geographers in the author team which prepared the human and social science school textbook for South Africa did not agree to the allocation of even a single section of the book to explicit historical narratives, so that historical text had to be blended into topical contemporary themes of each section of the book. Even the decision of the ANC-dominated government of South Africa to chart a new national course and place history at the service of the new nation was accompanied by many surprises. To the dismay of many observers, the government made ‘history and nation-building’ a responsibility not of the Department of Education, but of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST).<sup>103</sup> Another astonishing development was that although the Minister of DACST, Lionel Mtshali, acknowledged the responsibility that the government had entrusted to his outfit, the nation-building aspect of history was altogether missing from the school syllabus.<sup>104</sup>

Clearly, governments’ treatment of history has generally been very disappointing and appalling. What underscores this point is that while governments have historically shown the readiness to increase the subsidy to natural science students, they have dragged their feet in doing the same for students in the humanities in general. It is essential to note that governments’ support for the natural sciences and business programmes and their neglect of history usually influences students’ selection of the programmes to pursue. Many students, especially those who have financial problems or hope to get the opportunity to study abroad on scholarship, tend to select programmes that attract financial assistance from governments and ignore history, which does not enjoy the same privilege from these governments.

While the policies of some governments are unfavourable towards history, some teachers and headteachers or heads of history departments also worsen the situation by their unfortunate statements about history and other behaviours that do not help to put history in a good light. As one former history teacher recalled, “Some headteachers do not like history and, thus, make conditions difficult for history

---

<sup>99</sup> Folasade O. Ifammose, “History and the Challenges of Nation Building: A Comparative Analysis of Nigerian and American Experiences”, in K. Opoku-Agyemang, Jonathan Highfield and Dora Edu-Buandoh., eds., *The State of the Art(s): African Studies and American Studies in Comparative Perspective* (Cape Coast: IDS (un)Limited, 2006), 109.

<sup>100</sup> Nuttall and Wright, “Predicaments of Academic History”, 8.

<sup>101</sup> WhatsApp communication with Prof. Simon Ademola Ajayi, Aged 55 years, Professor of History, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, January 23, 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Nuttall and Wright, “Predicaments of Academic History”, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Nuttall and Wright, “Predicaments of Academic History”, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Nuttall and Wright, “Predicaments of Academic History”, 9.

teachers in their schools.”<sup>105</sup> This is to say that the rapid decline of history is partly due to the attitude of some educational authorities towards history. For varied reasons, some headteachers discourage students from reading history. Other school authorities do not support the study of history because they do not see any value in the subject. For example, Prof. Bernie L. Patterson, the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, proposed in 2018 that the school’s history major be eliminated and that at least one member of its tenured faculty is dismissed. This proposal was said to be a budget-cutting measure in response to the steadily declining number of declared majors.<sup>106</sup> One respondent also stated that when she was at Level 200 (second year) at the university, reading history, French and English, her former headteacher at Republic Road Schools (Junior High School, at Community 4, Tema) advised her to drop history and graduate with French and English. The headteacher’s reason was that history would only make the respondent a teacher at the Senior High School or Junior High School level where there is not much money.<sup>107</sup> Clearly, the activities of some school authorities have also contributed towards making history one of the disciplines of human knowledge that are relegated to the background in many countries around the world.

### *Dictates of the Job Market*

At present, the popular answer most people give to the question of the sort of education that should be given to students is that it should be a practical one to enable graduates to secure better jobs than they would otherwise be able to find.<sup>108</sup> For this reason, many parents and students demand to know the relevance of history to the contemporary problems of political and socio-economic development. One easily identifies in this observation that a major cause of the decline of interest in history is the rather unfortunate view held by many people, particularly students, that history offers no job opportunities. In Nigeria, for example, the view that history does not teach any particular skill and for that matter is irrelevant, led to calls for the elimination of history from the school curriculum.<sup>109</sup> In the United States of America, progressive educators, whose philosophy gained ascendancy at about the time that compulsory public education was being adopted in Western societies, believed that history did not possess any contemporary value to warrant serious treatment. They opined that academic subjects like history and algebra were acceptable for the privileged few who would go on to college and the service professions, but the vast majority of students would be better served by training in more practical skills suitable to the workplaces of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>110</sup> Even at present, they still tend to favour “learning by doing”, a philosophy inspired by the pragmatists, over the acquisition of academic knowledge. A study conducted by Eric Alterman shows that after the 2008 financial crisis, many American students, and their parents, felt a need to do majors in disciplines that might place them on a secure career path.<sup>111</sup> This is why disciplines and programmes such as accounting, business administration and management, computer science and information and communication technology, engineering, finance, medicine, nursing, statistics, etc., which are believed to have more *practical* touches, are held in high esteem and patronised more than the humanities, including history, which presumably lack this more important feature. It is even assumed that in a world of rapid change, education should strictly be related to preparation for practical careers and that this is its only purpose.

---

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Ms. Vida Cudjoe, Aged 54 years, Former History Teacher, Accra High School, and Current Assistant Headmistress, Nungua Senior High School, Accra, November 2, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Eric Alterman, “The Decline of Historical Thinking”, *The New Yorker* (February 4, 2019), Date Accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-decline-of-historical-thinking/amp>.

<sup>107</sup> WhatsApp communication with Barbara Ofori, Aged 23 years, History (and English) Graduate (2018), and National Service Person, Gambaga, North East Region, April 8, 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Friedrich, Ferenbaugh and Nash, “Five Ways to Wisdom”, 5.

<sup>109</sup> Samuel Olusoji Oyeranmi, “The Place of History in the 21st Century African Communities – The Nigerian Experience”, in *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume 2, No. 2.3, Quarter III (2011), pp. 1–2.

<sup>110</sup> Michael G. Maxwell, “The Uses of History: Why Bother with History?” (2011), Date Accessed May 16, 2019, [www.studentsfriend.com/onhist/uses.html](http://www.studentsfriend.com/onhist/uses.html).

<sup>111</sup> Alterman, “The Decline of Historical Thinking”.

It is understandable that in every country, both developed and developing, medical doctors, engineers, architects, lawyers, accountants, business managers and administrators, bankers, teachers, etc., are in high demand; hence despite the situation being very complex, the viewpoint tends to be taken that a full-time higher education should be fashioned in such a way as to readily yield a passport to a life-long and comfortable occupation. It is, nevertheless, important to note that no society could develop in the desired manner without history and that even if history in its proper sense could be neglected, the history of the so-called career-oriented disciplines could not be ignored since to understand these professions in their appropriate contexts demands an examination of their historical roots. In the 1980s, it was noted that the most popular course on the American college campus was not literature or history but accounting and that it was increasingly difficult to persuade students to take courses that would contribute to their intellectual development in addition to those that would make them good accountants.<sup>112</sup> Humans, it is true, are naturally practical and more concerned with the present and future than with the past, which evidently holds virtually all the keys to present and future predicaments and their solutions. Accordingly, though history prepares students for the job market, many people have developed a wrong attitude to it by either thinking that it could not offer any opportunities for employment as the presumed practical, job-oriented disciplines could do, or seeing it as lacking the ability to enhance employability in a labour market which values technocratic and applied skills. In Ghana, for example, this attitude often limits the scope of jobs available for graduates who specialise in history, while, in some cases, it becomes generally difficult for them to secure jobs altogether.<sup>113</sup>

## 2nd C: Condition – Evidence of the Decline of History in a Global Perspective

There is no doubt that there is a *condition* of the decline of interest in, and popularity of history. A careful examination of the situation in which history currently finds itself, not only in basic schools but also in colleges, universities and other institutions of learning in many countries around the world, developed or less-developed, rich or poor, shows that the discipline has become one of the endangered species, although it has not yet reached a fossilised stage. Historical scientists and practitioners now labour under the burden of substantiating the value and logic of studying past events. Many people and governments today pay little attention to their past and the serious study of their history. For example, a study conducted by D.A. Dwarko in 2007 shows that while economics, government and religious studies registered appreciable increases in the numbers of candidates who registered and wrote examinations in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) – now West African Senior High School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) – during the 2000–2005 period in Ghana, history, unfortunately, made only marginal gains over the same period. Dwarko’s findings illustrate that economics increased its initial number of 26,113 in 2000 to 61,421 in 2005 (an increase of 35,308 – 135.2%); government from 7,561 in 2000 to 24,674 in 2005 (an increase of 17,313 – 226.3%); religious studies from 5,178 in 2000 to 13,721 in 2005 (an increase of 8,543 – 165.0%); and history from 8,233 in 2000 and 13,960 in 2005 (and increase of only 5,727 – 69.6%).<sup>114</sup> Obviously, in both absolute numbers and percentage increase, history was the least patronised subject among the four disciplines. Data gathered from two Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis in 2010 also indicate that in one school, the number of students who read government between 2004 and 2007 exceeded those who read history by 191.<sup>115</sup> In the other school, the number of students who read government in the same period exceeded those who read history by 250.<sup>116</sup> This confirms Dwarko’s findings that in Senior High Schools in Ghana, history is the least patronised among the arts subjects in recent times.

<sup>112</sup> Friedrich, Ferenbaugh and Nash, “Five Ways to Wisdom”, 5.

<sup>113</sup> WhatsApp communication with Ms. Esther Diaba, Aged 36 years, History Graduate and Public Servant, March 25, 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Dwarko, “History – The Ailing Subject”, p. 170.

<sup>115</sup> Cobbold and Oppong, “Re-Echoing the Place of History in the School Curriculum”, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Cobbold and Oppong, “Re-Echoing the Place of History in the School Curriculum”, 88.

The unwillingness on the part of many senior high school students in Ghana to patronise history has invariably affected enrolment in universities and other institutions of higher learning, where a comparison between history and other sister disciplines also shows a consecutive decline in the number of students that are willing to enrol for a degree in history. Dwarko's study considers enrolment in the Department of History at the University of Cape Coast, from the 1996–1997 academic year to the 2002–2003 academic year (a seven-year period). It shows the academic years in which the students completed their programmes of study and the number of students who read history during their final year of study. The study shows that in the seven-year period, the Department of History admitted a total of 1,336 students made up of Senior High School graduates, GCE Advanced Level and Mature candidates. By the time they all reached their respective final year, however, only a total of 555 students remained history students, representing only 42% of the 1,336 students admitted to read history or a loss of 58% of this number to other disciplines.<sup>117</sup> The situation in other public universities as well as private tertiary institutions in Ghana and elsewhere is equally not encouraging. For instance, a study conducted by Benjamin N.E. Donkor in the Department of History at the University of Ghana shows that whereas over 2000 students registered to read history in the 1994/1995 academic year, only six (6), representing 0.3%, of this number, majored in history in their final year in the 1998/1999 academic year.<sup>118</sup>

This problem is not peculiar to Ghana. Between 1990 and 1996, there was a general trend of stability, and in some cases even an increase, in the number of students pursuing history in South African universities.<sup>119</sup> Since the late 1990s, however, there has been a sharp decline in enrolments, with a study conducted in 1998 indicating that in some universities, the numbers declined up to 50%.<sup>120</sup> Even in cases where the numbers held up, there was a steady decline in the number of students who read history as a single major subject. The result of this unfortunate development was that over time, history came to be pushed to the margins of students' choice, whereas previously it had traditionally been a core undergraduate subject for humanities students.<sup>121</sup> In late 2018, Benjamin M. Schmidt, a Professor of History at Northeastern University in the USA, conducted a study which showed that history declined more rapidly than any other major discipline in the last decade, even as more and more students attended colleges.<sup>122</sup> At colleges and universities in the USA, the number of history major students, in particular, and enrolment in history courses, in general, has also fallen at an alarming rate.<sup>123</sup> At the college level in the USA, the number of history majors fell sharply from 44,663 in 1970 to 19,301 in 1979, representing a reduction of 25,362 or a loss of 56.8% over the nine-year period.<sup>124</sup> Schmidt's study shows that history experienced a significant decline between 1969 and 1985 when the major dropped by 66%.<sup>125</sup> Records from the National Center for Education Statistics (USA) show that there were 34,642 history majors in 2008. However, by 2017, this had dropped to 24,266, with a notable single-year drop of more than 1,500 between 2016 and 2017.<sup>126</sup> By February 2019, it was estimated that there were slightly more than 24,000 history major students in the USA who accounted for between one and two per cent of bachelor's degrees, a drop of about a third since 2011.<sup>127</sup> Australia also started, in the 1970s, a programme of the systematic elimination of the study of history from many schools.<sup>128</sup> A 2009 report also established that in 2008, as many as 450,000 pupils of school-leaving

---

<sup>117</sup> Dwarko, "History – The Ailing Subject", 172–173.

<sup>118</sup> Donkor, "Rehabilitating the Image of History in Ghana", 76–77.

<sup>119</sup> Nuttal and Wright, "Predicaments of Academic History", 2.

<sup>120</sup> Nuttal and Wright, "Predicaments of Academic History", 3.

<sup>121</sup> Nuttal and Wright, "Predicaments of Academic History", 3.

<sup>122</sup> Alterman, "The Decline of Historical Thinking".

<sup>123</sup> Martin et al., *America and Its Peoples*, xxiv.

<sup>124</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History", 3.

<sup>125</sup> Jason Daley, "Why Are Fewer People Majoring in History?", SMARTNEWS (November 29, 2018), Date Accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-people-major-history-180970913/>.

<sup>126</sup> Daley, "Why Are Fewer People Majoring in History?".

<sup>127</sup> Alterman, "The Decline of Historical Thinking".

<sup>128</sup> "The Author Speaks about the Importance of Studying History".

age did not write the GCSE history examination in Britain; that about five million children had missed out on GCSE history since Labour assumed office; and that since 1997, the proportion of children writing the GCSE history examination had dropped from 35.4% to 31%.<sup>129</sup>

The empirical evidence provided here proves that the popularity of history as an academic discipline has suffered a huge deterioration. Outside the classrooms, many people in society display a considerable lack of interest in history. Because of the authors' interest in historical discourse, they often send copies of brief write-ups on selected historical developments to some of their WhatsApp contacts. Some of these people, some even being former history students, have responded categorically that they should stop sending them those *history things* because they are not interested in any historical events. One such former history student even threatened to block their line if they continued to send her those *history things*. Also, in December 2016, they formulated the question, "In your personal view, what is history?" and, as they often do, sent it on WhatsApp to some alumni of the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, whose contacts they had. This was a research question for a work they were doing then and needed the views of history teachers, graduates and students for incorporation in the work. One of them who completed his programme of study in 2006 refused to answer the question, and the reason he gave was, "I'm no longer going back to that [history] after the M.A. in Peace and Development Studies, my new area. I'm okay with the M.A. that I have."<sup>130</sup> He was no longer pursuing history; he had diverted to civil rights studies, so he did not want to have anything to do with history again. The conclusion drawn from that response was that if a history graduate could, within a space of only a decade after graduation, lose all interest in the discipline he studied at the university and presumptuously proclaim his disloyalty to, and secession from the *Kingdom of Clio*, then it is not surprising to find many people who have never pursued history display a great lack of interest in the discipline, and in the history of their own lives and the lives of the people and institutions around them.

### 3rd C: Consequences of the Decline of History

It is important to note at this point that the existing condition has produced some unpalatable consequences. Examined critically, some of them appear to have originally existed in the form of causes, and have now transformed into consequences. As the law of cause and effect emphasises, "All actions have reactions that will return to the source."<sup>131</sup> In other words, some of the causes which occurred and existed some years ago have returned to the decline of interest in history equation in the form of effects, probably to either remind us of the failure or inability to deal completely with them when they first appeared as problems among past generations or to inform us of the similarities in the conditions of our generation and those of the past – the universality of the human condition and interconnectedness.

At any rate, one gross consequence of the decline of interest in, and popularity of, history, which doubles as a cause of the problem, has been the rapid waning of interest in history, particularly on the part of most of the youth of today. Ms. Mavis Enyonam Kodzitse complained that

Our failure to ensure the study of history has made a lot of people lose the value or importance that history has in our lives, families, communities, societies and nations in general. For example, during community festivals and other traditional occasions, the histories of these communities are recounted, but you will see a lot of the youth moving out of the auditoriums claiming the place is boring, they are talking too much, the talk is unnecessary.<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Hodges, "The Big Question".

<sup>130</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Samuel Comey, Aged 37 years, History Graduate (2006). WhatsApp communication: December 23, 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Open College UK Ltd., "Law of Cause and Effect".

<sup>132</sup> WhatsApp communication with Ms. Mavis Enyonam Kodzitse, Aged 23 years, History Graduate (2018) and Teacher, Calvary Methodist School, Accra, October 3, 2019.

This is what one respondent has described as a huge “... lack of students’ interest in the learning of history” and the lack of knowledge of “... the works of the early nationalist movements ...” on the part of many Ghanaian youth.<sup>133</sup> Many contemporary governments have also behaved just like their predecessors. Until recently, many of them had generally refused to introduce the subject at the basic school level. Institutions and authorities have generally failed to implement policies that would provide incentives to arouse the interest of students in history, in particular, and the arts and humanities in general.<sup>134</sup> In effect, both individuals and institutions have lost, and continue to lose, interest in the study of history and the general significant cultural past.

Another cause which has come back in the form of effect is the lack of competent teachers to teach the subject at the pre-tertiary level and lecturers to handle history courses in colleges and universities. Obviously, it is students who develop into teachers, so the refusal on the part of many students to read history means that there would not be many competent history teachers to teach the subject at the various levels of education. As a sequel, some of the books on the history of Ghana and Africa available on the market for Senior High School students are very poorly prepared since their authors lack the knowledge and skills required for the preparation of such works. Indeed, the research discovered that the decline of interest in history has had adverse effects on the objective analysis of historical data.<sup>135</sup> The lack of more qualified objective historians has allowed incompetent history teachers and authors to teach and write history and, thus, interpret and analyse historical events to project their personal and ideological interests. These people are responsible for the higher degree of subjectivity we often encounter in historical accounts.

Another major consequence of the condition of the decline of interest in history is that as a result of their disinterestedness in history, many junior and senior high school graduates, as well as college and university graduates, have limited knowledge about the history of their communities and countries, not to mention the histories of other communities and countries. For example, media discussions and high school students quiz competitions organised as part of the activities marking Ghana’s fiftieth independence anniversary celebrations in 2007 revealed disappointing inadequacies in the knowledge of their national history.<sup>136</sup> These discussions and quizzes showed that many Ghanaian students, in particular, and citizens, in general, had virtually no knowledge about who their past leaders were, let alone about their deeds and misdeeds.

In 2008 and 2009, Chief Examiners of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) observed that many candidates who sat for examinations in history lacked the basic historical knowledge required to answer questions.<sup>137</sup> Many of the candidates were completely incapable of relating the past to present developments and future aspirations. Because of their limited historical understanding of recent events, they had little sense of causation or consequence. They lacked the experience of constructing meaningful patterns of explanation and interpretation that creates out of these events an intelligible, usable past. It is this development that the Historical Society of Ghana found highly worrying in its 2008 budget proposal to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports.<sup>138</sup> The Society wondered if the youth would be able to make informed choices for development, as the needs of the present and future remained illusory to them. Surprisingly, even some university students and graduates do not understand why President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo is the fifth president

---

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Swaniker.

<sup>134</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Ransford Adu, Aged 30 years, History Tutor, Adankwaman Senior High School, Adankwaman, October 3, 2019.

<sup>135</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Emmanuel A. John Awine, Aged 26 years, Third Year (Level 300) History (Single Major) Student, University of Cape Coast, October 3, 2019.

<sup>136</sup> Kwabena Adu-Boahen, “School History in Ghana, Identity and Cultural Affinity in the Atlantic World”, *UNISA Latin American Report*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2011), 155.

<sup>137</sup> West African Examinations Council, *Report of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC)*, (Accra: WAEC, 2009), 9; West African Examinations Council, *Report of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC)*, (Accra: WAEC, 2008), 183.

<sup>138</sup> Historical Society of Ghana, “Enhancing the Study and Appreciation of History in the Educational System and the Ghanaian Society”, Proposal presented to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (2008), 3.

of Ghana's Fourth Republic, another instance showing the generally poor, or total lack of, historical knowledge on the part of the contemporary youth, in particular, and of Ghanaians, in general. In Australia, the same problem has been identified. During the 1980s, it became increasingly clear that many Australian children had little or no awareness of the history of the country.<sup>139</sup> The USA also suffers from the same fate as a study conducted by Ravitch in 1985 showed disappointing results. Many professors who taught history to undergraduate students confirmed that their students had no historical knowledge about the USA while others stated that their students had no point of reference for understanding World War I, the Treaty of Versailles or the Holocaust.<sup>140</sup> A study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1976 showed that only 44% of 17-year-old college students knew that the term *Cold War* referred to poor relations between the United States and the Soviet Union after 1945.<sup>141</sup>

In addition, some scholars, including Hegel and Coleridge, have emphasised that "All that we learn from history is that we do not learn anything from history." Indeed, history is meant to correct and avoid the errors of the past, so if people knew about the mistakes that had been committed before, they would try to avoid making the same mistakes.<sup>142</sup> However, our lack of historical knowledge has led to our continuous repetition of the mistakes committed by past generations.<sup>143</sup> This problem relates not to individuals alone but also to whole institutions, communities and societies. National or government leaders are often found repeating past mistakes. In Ghanaian politics, for example, new governments are often found committing the same mistakes former administrations committed and for which they were voted out of office.

The poor historical knowledge and historical consciousness have partly contributed to the numerous problems that contemporary societies suffer from. Some of the challenges faced today are similar to those experienced by past societies. However, because much of the history is not known, there is an unawareness of the solutions past societies applied to these challenges. Genuinely, history serves as a measure of humanity and identity; it exposes students to cultural heritage for enlightenment and pride; it preserves cultural heritage; it inculcates moral and ethical values; it develops the imaginative abilities of students and promotes critical thinking. Again, history promotes national integration and tolerance and trains patriotic and democratic citizens. Historical studies prepare people for public service and political leadership. The study of history provides models for policy decisions. It provides keys to understanding the present and foreseeing the future. Finally, the study of history provides knowledge and skills required for success and survival in the job market. In essence, failure to place a premium on the serious study of history means a seeming lack of all of the above benefits.

Some people believe that the loss of institutional memory has been a major effect of the decline of interest in history.<sup>144</sup> Again, many people either have lost or do not know their true identity.<sup>145</sup> They do not know where they came from, and so they are ignorant of who they are. Such people are not able to display the culture and traditions of their countries to foreigners. The loss of cultural identity as a result of the lack of historical knowledge and awareness often leads to the loss of self-esteem and association with the so-called prestigious cultures, as well as allowing other people to define them.<sup>146</sup> Historical knowledge could help reduce the rate of conflicts between people, households, families, communities, ethnic groups, and societies because it would reveal the common ancestry or origins shared with the very people being fought against. The spirit of intolerance and hatred in some people towards others and the many inter-ethnic conflicts often experienced are all partly the result of a lack

---

<sup>139</sup> "The Author Speaks about the Importance of Studying History".

<sup>140</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History", 2.

<sup>141</sup> Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History", 3.

<sup>142</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Festus Cobena Aino, Aged 23 years, Third Year (Level 300) History and Religion and Human Values Student, University of Cape Coast, October 3, 2019.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Bainson.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Dunee.

<sup>145</sup> Interviews with Bainson and Swaniker.

<sup>146</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Andy Agyei Nuamah, Aged 26 years, Third Year (Level 300) History and Philosophy Student, University of Cape Coast, October 3, 2019.

of historical knowledge and consciousness. As one respondent emphasised, the decline of interest in history has led to a lack of national unity.<sup>147</sup> Lack of historical knowledge has also contributed to the rapid growth of indifference and unpatriotic tendencies on the part of many people today.<sup>148</sup> Many people have become spectators instead of concerned and patriotic citizens. Because they do not read history, they are not aware of how the predecessors worked hard and made significant contributions toward the founding and building of societies. They are, therefore, ignorant of the honour attached to service to the various communities and societies. Lack of patriotism has led to bribery and corruption at all levels.<sup>149</sup> The immoral attitude on the part of the youth in many societies across the world is equally due to a lack of historical knowledge.<sup>150</sup> A respondent attributed indiscipline among the youth and brain drain to a lack of historical knowledge.<sup>151</sup>

It is also significant to note that the neglect of history has contributed much to the slow pace of development. In other words, the lack of the essence of history and historical awareness has considerably affected the growth of societies.<sup>152</sup> For one reason, policy implementation has been heavily affected in the sense that "... most policymakers do not have the historical knowledge to shape the future or engage in constructive analysis" of events to create the necessary conditions for progress.<sup>153</sup> For another reason, historical studies are development studies and vice versa. In fact, some scholars rightly insist that development could be better understood from a historical perspective because of the development inclinations of historical studies. At the end of the Cold War, for example, a group of historians and social scientists set out to examine development as *history*, to understand and offer solutions to the prolonged crisis of development that African, Asia and Latin American countries experienced.<sup>154</sup> These scholars proposed to use history as the methodology for understanding development, rather than constructivist development theories to explain history and to provide predictive models for the future. The idea of studying development as history, or adopting history as a method for the study of the development, points to the fact that the historical study of any society, community, association, institution, process, event, individual, etc. implies a study of the development of such entities from a historical perspective. This is what is commonly referred to as the *historical perspective on development* which is usually the focus of literature on development history.<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, the inability to develop in the desired manner partly stems from the failure or refusal to study history. One respondent put the argument better when he stated that

In order for any group of people to make meaningful progress, it is imperative that they know "where they are coming from", "where they are now", and "where they are going". Losing sight of any of these three elements can be a stumbling block to the progress the people seek. Knowing where you are coming from is knowing your history. Historical events can and should guide people into making decisions that bode well for them. In effect, raising a generation without the knowledge of their history may work against their progress in that they would not have the experiences from the past to learn from.<sup>156</sup>

---

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Duneé.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Appiah Dwumfour.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Swaniker.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Appiah Dwumfour.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Swaniker.

<sup>152</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Eric Osei Prempeh, Aged 25 years, Final Year (Level 400) History (Single Major) Student, University of Cape Coast, October 3, 2019.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Awine.

<sup>154</sup> Claude S. Phillips, *The African Political Dictionary* (California: ABC-Clio, Inc. and Oxford: Clio Press Ltd., 1984), 112.

<sup>155</sup> Nicholas F.R. Crafts, "Development History", Working Paper No. 54/00, Department of Economic History, London School of Economics (2000); Nathan Nunn, "Historical Development", *Handbook of Economic Growth*, Vol. 2A (Cambridge, MA: Elsevier B.V., 2014), 347–402.

<sup>156</sup> WhatsApp communication with Mr. Michael Boateng, Aged 25 years, History Graduate (2018) and Manager, Charisma Hotel, Kwadaso-Ohwimase, Kumasi, October 3, 2019.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has employed the law of cause and effect and the concept of the “3Cs of historical events” or historical connections to examine and establish relationships between the causes, conditions and consequences of the problem of the decline of interest in the study of history and the popularity of history. It has provided evidence to show that interest in history, as both a subject of study in academic institutions and an embodiment of the general cultural past, has declined appreciably over the years. Through a careful exploration of different perspectives, an attempt has been made to account for this unfortunate development. It has also briefly examined some of the consequences of the neglect of the study of history. It is now obvious that several factors have combined and conspired to make history one of the disciplines of human knowledge that are relegated to the background in many countries around the world. This denigration has affected history in so many ways and has produced several unfavourable consequences, some of which have been highlighted in this study. Ultimately, the conceptual framework applied and the methodology adopted have helped to achieve the general and specific objectives of the study. The findings have also proven the authenticity of the theoretical framework adopted to undertake the study.

The authors wish to state, however, that the indifferent attitude on the part of the present generation towards history is neither unique nor astounding. A study of history shows that this attitude is just a continuation, or a hastening, of a process initiated by previous generations. It could also be said to be the harvest of a habit cultivated by the predecessors. It is certainly part of the human evolutionary process. As Ecclesiastes 1:11 makes it clear, ‘we do not remember what happened in the past, and in future generations, no one will remember what we are doing now.’ It is, however, heartrending and highly regrettable that an important body of knowledge like history is despised and deserted by individuals and societies. The failure to recast and study the past is an overt indication of the unpreparedness to exploit the usable experiences of past generations to enable a breakdown of some of the major obstacles working against attempts at development. It implies an unwillingness to total liberation from the ignorance of some delicate issues, and the disinclination to discover good solutions to the many problems in which modern society is seriously engulfed. In fact, the general effects outlined above justify these observations.

Nevertheless, the authors are mindful of the fact that “All causes will have an effect on everything and anything within the universe which will then lead to further causes of other things and so the replication or chain reaction of events continues infinitely.” As a result, the effects of the decline of interest in history would also transform into causes and lead to the production of more unpalatable consequences in the future if serious attempts are not made to arrest the situation now. Given this, the authors believe that stakeholders would institute measures that would help to resuscitate history and strengthen the place of the discipline in schools. In this resuscitation project, the historical societies, departments of history in the various universities and colleges, and professional historians have a great responsibility to save their profession from eventual demise, especially when it is considered that some of them have also contributed a great deal to the decline of interest in and patronage of history through their *misguided* observations about the discipline. As has been observed and is clear by now, the forces working against the survival of history are of internal and external origins, internal problems and external invasions. However, the ability of the external factors to operate effectively would depend largely on the extent to which the internal problems would create the avenue for such operation. As Will Durant has observed, “A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within.”<sup>157</sup> The authors believe that most of the factors leading to the fall of the one-time prestigious discipline of history are self-inflicted, – bad teachers and wrong teaching methods – the remedy of which lies with historians themselves. Consequently, the ability of the discipline to get up from its sickbed would depend much on the role historians would play in the resuscitation campaign.

---

<sup>157</sup> Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Part III: Caesar and Christ – A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325, Eighteenth Printing (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 665.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Addo-Fening, Robert. *Abrewa Nana: A Trajectory of Life, An Autobiography*. Tema: Digibooks Ghana Ltd., 2018.
- Adjepong, Adjei. Historical Society of Ghana, “Resuscitating ‘Clio’ in Twenty-First-Century Ghana: A Proposal to the Nana Akufo-Addo-NPP Government for Making History a Core Subject in Senior High Schools in Ghana”. January, 2017.
- Adjepong, Adjei. “The Image of Pre-colonial Africa in European Circles”. In Eric Sakyi Nketiah, Ed. *Distance Forum: A Multidisciplinary Book of Academic Articles*. Vol. 1. 2011. pp. 15–37.
- Adu-Boahen, Kwabena. “Research and Teaching History in Ghana – Challenges and Prospects”. Paper presented at Historical Society of Ghana/Danish History Teachers Association and Culture, Education and Technology Network (CETNET) Seminar, Kwabena Nketia Conference Hall, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, February 14, 2011.
- Adu-Boahen, Kwabena. “School History in Ghana, Identity and Cultural Affinity in the Atlantic World”. *UNISA Latin American Report*. Vol. 27, No. 1. 2011. 155–163.
- Alterman, Eric. “The Decline of Historical Thinking”. *The New Yorker*. February 4, 2019. Accessed on February 14, 2019, from <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-decline-of-historical-thinking/>
- Barzun, Jacques and Henry E. Graff. *The Modern Researcher*. Third Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977.
- Boahen, A. Adu. *Clio and Nation-Building in Africa*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1975.
- Cobbold, Cosmas and Charles Adabo Opong. “Re-Echoing the Place of History in the School Curriculum”. *International Journal of Education Leadership*. Vol. 3, No. 3. 2010. 89–96.
- Collins English Dictionary. “Definition and Meaning of ‘Event’”. Accessed on January 2, 2019, from [www.collinsdictionary.com/amp/english/event](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/amp/english/event).
- Colonial Office. *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Gold Coast 1948*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1948.
- Cooper, Adrian P. “The Universal Law of Cause and effect”. *Our Ultimate Reality*. Accessed on August 18, 2019, from <https://ourultimatereality.com/the-universal-law-of-cause-and-effect.html>.
- Crafts, Nicholas F.R. “Development History”. Working Paper No. 54/00. Department of Economic History, London School of Economics. 2000.
- Crookall, M.B.E. *Handbook for History Teachers in West Africa*. London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1960.
- Daley, Jason. “Why Are Fewer People Majoring in History?”. *SMARTNEWS*. November 29, 2018. Accessed on April 13, 2019, from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/why-people-major-history.180970913/>.
- Donkor, Benjamin N.E. “Rehabilitating the Image of History in Ghana”. In James Martin Weiler, Ed. *Social Sciences Today: A Collection of Writings on Current Issues in Social Science*. Winneba: Department of Social Science Education, University of Education, Winneba, 2009. 74–83.
- Dwarko, D.A. “History – The Ailing Subject: The Need for Revival in the 21st Century”. In D.E.K. Amenumey, Ed. *Challenges of Education in Ghana in the 21st Century*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2007. 167–178.
- Durant, Will. *The Story of Civilization*. Part III: Caesar and Christ – A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325. Eighteenth Printing. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954.
- Evans, Ivor H. *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1993.
- Evans, Richard J. “Make History Compulsory for the Right Reasons”. Accessed on May 23, 2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/26/history-compulsory-right-reasons>.
- Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast. *Faculty Brochure, 2013–2016*. Cape Coast: University of Cape Coast Press, 2013.

- Fields, Lanny B., Russell J. Barber and Cheryl A. Riggs. *The Global Past*. Volume One. Boston: Bedford Books, and New York: St. Martin's, 1988.
- Fynn, J.K., R. Addo-Fening and J. Anquandah. Eds. *History for Senior Secondary Schools*. Reprinted. Accra: Ministry of Education, and London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1993.
- Hayek, Friedrich A. "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design". In Richard M. Ebeling, Ed. *Champions of Freedom: Austrian Economics: A Reader: The Ludwig von Mises Lecture Series*. Volume 18. Hillsdale, Michigan: Hillsdale College Press, 1991. 134–149.
- Friedrich, Otto, Dorothy Ferenbaugh, and Madeleine Nash. "Five Ways to Wisdom". In Thomas B. Jones, Ed. *The Educated Person: A Collection of Contemporary American Essays*. St. Paul, Minnesota: Metropolitan State University, 1989. 1–12.
- Herbst, Jürgen. "The Teacher of History". In Ernest Stabler, Ed. *The Education of the Secondary School Teacher*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1962. 143–163.
- Historical Society of Ghana. October, "Enhancing the study and Appreciation of History in the Educational System and the Ghanaian Society". Proposal presented to the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports. 2008.
- Hodges, Lucy. "The Big Question: Why Are Fewer Pupils Studying History, and What Can be Done About It". Accessed on May 23, 2019, from [www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-big-question-why-are-fewer-pupils-studying-history-and-what-can-be-done-about-it-1691115.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/the-big-question-why-are-fewer-pupils-studying-history-and-what-can-be-done-about-it-1691115.html).
- Holt, T. *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination and Understanding*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1999.
- Ifamose, Folasade O. "History and the Challenges of Nation Building: A Comparative Analysis of Nigerian and American Experiences". In K. Opoku-Agyemang, Jonathan Highfield, and Dora Edu-Buandoh., Eds. *The State of the Art(s): African Studies and American Studies in Comparative Perspective*. Cape Coast: IDS (un)Limited, 2006. 109–126.
- Jay, Anthony. Ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Kipgen, Paominlen. "Historiography, Definitions, Nature and Scope of History". Accessed on August 17, 2019, from [academia.edu/31041228/Historiography\\_Definitions\\_Nature\\_and\\_Scope\\_of\\_History](http://academia.edu/31041228/Historiography_Definitions_Nature_and_Scope_of_History).
- Lewis, R.W.B. *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1955.
- Loken, Camillo. "The Law of Cause and Effect". *One Mind – One Energy*. Accessed on August 18, 2019, from <https://www.one-mind-one-energy.com/law-of-cause-and-effect.html>.
- Lovejoy, Arthur O. "Present Standpoints and Past History". In Hans Meyerhoff, Ed. *The Philosophy of History in Our Time*. Anchor Books Edition. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959. 173–187.
- Markowicz, Karol. "Why Schools Have Stopped Teaching American History". Accessed on May 23, 2019, from [nypost.com/2017/01/22/why-schools-have-stopped-teaching-american-history/](http://nypost.com/2017/01/22/why-schools-have-stopped-teaching-american-history/).
- Martin, James Kirby et al. *America and Its Peoples: A Mosaic in the Making*. Fifth Edition. New York et al.: Pearson and Longman, 2004.
- Maxwell, Michael G. "The Uses of History: Why Bother with History?". 2011. Retrieved May 16, 2019, from [www.studentsfriend.com/onhist/uses.html](http://www.studentsfriend.com/onhist/uses.html).
- McLynn, Neil. "Personal Perspectives: A View from Japan". In Andrew Erskine, Ed. *A Companion to Ancient History*. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009. 7–8.
- Mises, Ludwig von. "Social Science and Natural Science". In Richard M. Ebeling, Ed. *Champions of Freedom: Austrian Economics: A Reader: The Ludwig von Mises Lecture Series*. Volume 18. Hillsdale, Michigan: Hillsdale College Press, 1991. 92–109.
- Mises, Ludwig von. *Theory and History: An Interpretation of Social and Economic Evolution*. Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007.
- Nuttal, Tim and John Wright. "Probing the Predicaments of Academic History in Contemporary South Africa". Paper for the 'International Conference on New African Perspectives: Africa,

- Australasia and the Wider World at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’, Organised by the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, at Perth, Australia, November 26–28, 1999.
- Open College UK Ltd. “Law of Cause and Effect”. Accessed on August 18, 2019, from <https://www.opencollege.info/law-of-cause-and-effect/>.
- Osei, Osafo K. *A Discourse on Akan Perpetual Calendar: For Religious Ceremonies and Festivals – 1700–2200 A.D.* Accra: Domak Press Ltd., 1997.
- Oyeranmi, Samuel Olusoji. “The Place of History in the 21st Century African Communities – The Nigerian Experience”. In *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*. Volume 2, No. 2.3. Quarter III. 2011. 1–23.
- Palmer, R.R. and Joel Colton. *A History of the Modern World*. Second Edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964.
- Partin, Robert. “The Meaning of History: “A Different Approach Entirely””. *The Historian*. Vol. 31, No. 3. May 1969. 431–435.
- Phillips, Claude S. *The African Political Dictionary*. California: ABC-Clio, Inc. and Oxford: Clio Press Ltd., 1984.
- Popper, Karl R. “What is Dialectic”. In E. von Goldammer, Ed. *Vordenker*. Summer Edition. 2004. Accessed on March 25, 2014, from [www.vordenker.de](http://www.vordenker.de).
- “Quotes about History”. Accessed on July 29, 2019, from <http://homepage.eircom.net/~odyssey/Quotes/History/Historians.html>.
- “Quotes About History”. *History News Network*. December, 2005. Accessed on June 7, 2019, from <http://hnn.us/articles/1328.html>.
- Ravitch, Diane. “Decline and Fall of Teaching History”. 1985. Accessed on March 31, 2019, from <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/17/magazine/decline-and-fall-of-teaching-history.html?pagewanted=5>.
- Renier, G.J. *History: Its Purpose and Method*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950.
- Richards, Robert J. “The Role of Biography in Intellectual History”. *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge*. Fall 2017. 1–25.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*. First Paperback Printing. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1962.
- Shemilt, D. “The Caliph’s Coin: The Currency of Narrative Frameworks in History Teaching”. In P.N. Stearns, P. Seixas and S. Wineburg, Eds. *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspective*. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 83–101.
- Simpson, John and Jennifer Speake. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*. Third Edition. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Szasz, Ferenc M. “Historical Quotations”. *History News Network*. 2005. Accessed on June 7, 2019, from <http://hnn.us/articles/1328.html>.
- “The Author Speaks about the Importance of Studying History”. Accessed on April 10, 2019, from <http://www.pacificwar.org.au/AboutAuthor/StudyingHistory.html>.
- The Quote Garden. “Quotations about History”. Accessed on June 7, 2019, from <http://www.quote garden.com/history.html>.
- Woolcock, Michael, Simon Szreter and Vijayendra Rao. “How and Why Does History Matter for Development Policy?”. *Journal of Development Studies*. Volume 47, No. 1. 2011. 70–96.
- The West African Examinations Council. *West African Senior School Certificate Examination, May/June 2008 Chief Examiners’ Reports (General Arts Programme)*. Accra: WAEC, 2009.
- The West African Examinations Council. *West African Senior School Certificate Examination, May/June 2009 Chief Examiners’ Reports (General Arts Programme)*. Accra: WAEC, 2008.

## ABOUT AUTHORS

**ADJEI ADJEPONG** is a lecturer in the Department of History, University of Cape Coast. He has specialised and undertaken vigorous research in the areas of history of migrations and expulsions in Africa, philosophy of history and African historiography. He has also researched into the application

of theories in historical reconstruction, the role of African women in the political development of precolonial Africa, and the contemporary significance of the study of History as a subject. He has, accordingly, published several articles in these fields of specialisation.

**CHARLES ADABO OPPONG** is an Associate Professor in History Education at the University of Cape Coast. His primary research areas of interest include history education, curriculum implementation and evaluation. Charles is the author of several research papers in reputable journals. He is also a senior research fellow and doubles as the education expert at Research Trust in Ghana. Charles has presented papers at international conferences on History Education and other education related fields. He has also undertaken several consultancy assignments for local and international organisations including T-TEL, National Teaching Council, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), among others. Charles received his Bachelor of Education in Arts and M.Phil from University of Cape Coast, and his Doctorate from UNISA, South Africa.

**JOSEPH UDIMAL KACHIM** currently lectures at the Department of History, University of Cape Coast in Ghana. He obtained his PhD from the University of the Free State in South Africa, with the International Studies Group. His research interest is in colonial and post-colonial history of northern Ghana. He has also researched on the history of education. His recent publication is on Konkomba cross border mobility which stems from his PhD thesis. He has won a number of grants and fellowships, including the prestigious ACLS African Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Program.