An Overview on the Relevance of Multidisciplinary Approach in Historical Writing

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Abstract
The paper discusses the relevance of multidisciplinary approach in historical writing, it recognizes the relevance of other fields in data collection and analysis in the reconstruction of history. It extensively explains the meaning and importance of multidisciplinary approach in relation to history and the examined it relevance in historical writing. The paper also provides some examples of disciplines like; Archaeology, Linguistics, Geography, Philosophy, Music and International Relations, Religion as well as in the Natural and Physical Sciences. The paper explained demography (information regarding the movement of people, births and deaths, fertility rates, immigrations etc) contribute enormously in the process of historical writing. The paper highlights seven points, as raised by Akombo on the importance of multidisciplinary approach in historical writing. Finally the paper concludes on the rapport between history and other disciplines in the process of historical writing.

Introduction
Multidisciplinary knowledge is associated with more than one existing academic discipline or profession and is composed of combining separate branches of learning or fields of expertise. A multidisciplinary community is made up of people from different academic disciplines and professions. These people partner in addressing a common intellectual challenge. A multidisciplinary person is one with degrees from two or more academic disciplines. This one person can take the place of two or more people in a multidisciplinary community.
According to Kenneth Dike; the growing tendency for scholars to become increasingly specialized within their own disciplines and for disciplines to become true to themselves has been accompanied by a re-marry of the humanities and the social sciences, a shift from the dichotomy of man and society to the integration of man-in-society.²

However, multidisciplinary work does not typically lead to an increase or a decrease in the number of academic disciplines. History shows a record of cases that aim to create a system of universal justice, which involved others which is going to be major focus this work is to bring to lamplight the importance of other disciplines to historical writings.

Definition of Concepts
Multidisciplinary approach involves drawing appropriately from multiple disciplines to redefines problems outside of normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations.³ Multidisciplinary can also be defined as a particular relationship existing disciplines. At minimum, it could mean the collaboration of a few disciplines around the joint theme. Therefore, it is where two or more academic disciplines collaborate for a specific purpose, for instance, when computer scientists, psychologists and sociologists cooperate in the design of human/computer interfaces, use of skills and knowledge from the disciplines mentioned. Multidisciplinary is very imperative in the creation of not only computer science, but almost all disciplines. Even though all disciplines remain distinct, the differences between the disciplines can be quite subtle. For example, architects, engineers and quantity surveyors commonly work together on construction projects, each applying their specialist knowledge to their own area of expertise. When a project is completed, each of the specialists returns to his own area of expertise to start other projects.

Multidisciplinary can also be defined as a particular relationship between existing disciplines. The French philosopher, Roland Barthes, views multidisciplinary as the creation of a new object of study that no existing discipline owns. He indicated a clear demarcation between subjects located inside the boundaries of any existing discipline and subjects outside them, the latter being the potential candidates for interdisciplinary approaches.⁴

The idea of multidisciplinary has gained foothold in many, if not most disciplines, including the natural sciences which were long seen as
fortresses of the so-called pure research, untouched by other disciplines. However, the contents of the notion of multidisciplinary are usually not discussed. The word is employed almost as a form of rhetoric: to illustrate divergence of interdependence to other disciplines about research trends. The consequences of multidisciplinary on research rarely seem to be problematised, although they clearly must and do alter research practices.

Historical Writing
The historian's goal is not to merely collect the “facts” about the past, but rather to acquire insights into the ideas and realities that shaped the past of lives of men and women of earlier generations. History, however, is the study of the beliefs and desires, practices and institutions of human beings. African history is also another area where historians explore in studying the past institutions and cultures of the people who live in Africa.

The economic, political and social activities of the people who had once lived, helped in the discovery of the activities of man in far off times. Africa has been proved by researchers like Dr. Louis Leakey to be the original home of man (Homo sapiens). Leakey’s research, in particular, led to discoveries of hidden facts and highlight of Africa's contribution to the world civilization. It also gives on individual the opportunity to relate his past with the present in a better way. Thus, the various stages of society's development have to be evaluated to understand the present situation.

African history has addressed the notion and misconception that Africa has contributed little to history. It has also dispelled the idea of white superiority. For example, the Hamitic hypothesis states that everything of value ever found in Africa was brought there by the Hamites, allegedly a branch of the Caucasian race and assumes that the African 'Hamites' were 'whites' akin to the European as they and their cultures were inherently superior to the Black Africans and their culture, so that wherever Black Africans had apparently made a striking advance, the explanation must be sought in 'Hamitic' influence. Early Arab and European travelers met Africans in different cultural settings, and Africans had distinctive names, music and dances, political and religious settings as well as rites of passage. History in the African context increase human tolerance and respect for differences in opinion and knowledge of other cultures encourages historian to engage in critical analysis of their own culture and society and to understand and criticize their own assumptions. A proper examination of the past impacted greatly on how we came to be who we are, and
appreciate the use of other sources in the writing and reconstruction of African history. Apart from written sources, it enables them to develop an accurate sense of African historical chronology.³

The Relevance of Multidisciplinary Approach in Historical Writing
The aim of multidisciplinary approach in historical writing is to give a good shape and understanding to the subject being studied. It is a technique that establishes reciprocal relationship between history and other disciplines for better understanding of a historical event under study. This demonstrates the fact that no discipline is independent on its own until it correlates with other subjects. Knowledge is a unity. It is therefore, essential to adopt the multidisciplinary approach in order to maintain its-united nature.

Specifically, the disciplines from which benefit the study of history derives useful inputs are grouped into three: Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural and Physical Sciences. Each subject has immensely contributed to the discipline of history in one way or the other in both historical findings and historical writings. Archaeology, for example, is the study of the human past using scientific analyses of material remains. The aim of both Archaeology and History is the research of the human past, and the difference between them derives from the source materials. Historians rely more on written source materials, while archaeologists concentrate on the physical remains. Combining the two will offer a holistic view and a deeper understanding of the past than either history or archaeology in isolation.

Importantly, the history concerned specifically with the ancient times can draw data from archaeological evidence. This applies more to the study of pre-literate society; since the art of writing in general does not go beyond 3000 B.C. According to Ki Zerbo, for instance, “what is known concerning the development of man comes from archaeological findings...Archaeology supplies chronological base or sequence useful for historical construction”.¹⁰ The major dating techniques of Archaeology include “Radio Carbon Dating” which establishes date as far as 70, 000BC. “Potassium Organ Dating” “is another dating technique which could as well date and extend back to 10 million years ago. There is, also, 'Thermoluminiscent Dating' technique used for pottery objects.”¹¹ The three dating techniques cannot be ascertained by an archaeologist alone without the assistance of a scientist, even the chemical use of the physics of an object is also made by a scientist.
Similarly, Linguistics and History as disciplines work together in tracing the history of a community and the history of the language they speak. Several techniques of linguistic research provide vital information to history. One of the techniques is historical linguistics which studies language change in time and in space with a view to establishing the degree of divergence between two stages of a language and accounting for the evolution of divergent stages.

Another technique used in linguistics which is useful to history is the study of loan words; this shows the relationship between the speakers of one language and another language from which they have borrowed vocabulary items. For example, Joseph Greenberg, the renowned linguist, has demonstrated in his linguistic analysis of Kanuri loan words in the Hausa language that the Hausa obtained several of their political titles from Kanuri, for example; Shatima, Galadima, Matawalle, etc. This would indicate that Borno Empire exercised some influence on the Hausa states in the past. The identification of loan words between Kanuri and the Hausa of northern Nigeria can give much information about the penetration of the Islamic religion in that area as well as the interchange of military ideas. The historian can better understand how words were borrowed from one ethnic group to another by consulting or reading from the books of expert in historical linguistic.

Another discipline that is important for corroborating of knowledge for historical reconstruction and vice versa is literature. Literature writers turn to Historical documents or oral source to get information to use as a framework to feed their imagination. This led to the creative works or true life story such as: Chinua Achebe’s “Things Fall Apart” and “There was a Country”, Elechi Amadi’s book “Sunset in Biafra” in which she reminiscents on the Nigeria Civil War and Wole Soyinka’s “Death and Kings Horseman” which was based on real events that took place in Oyo in 1946 when Chief Elesin was required by native traditions to die and accompany the departed Alafin to his grave. In similar event, historians sometimes learn the details of lives of ordinary men and women through literature. Even though such stories may be imaginary, legends or myths, lines of truth can be deducted for historical reconstruction.

History and Philosophy introduced perspectives that proved to be of great value to both disciplines over the years. When a Historian writes a piece, he is engaging philosophy in his focus, mode of analysis and manner of presentation. For instance, Karl Marx’s historical materialism opened the
eyes of scholars to the predominance of economic factors in historical development. Dependency theory and Marxism are very popular in the historiography of underdevelopment of Africa, for example, a book written by Walter Rodney in 1972 “How Europe underdeveloped Africa”, and many more.

Geography is another discipline that the historian relates with when describing a particular place. The subject focuses on human interaction with the physical environment. History views human experience from the perspective of time, while geography views human from the perspective of space and climate of a country greatly affects its civilization. Therefore, the knowledge of Geography and History enables learners to understand how events and places affect each other across time, and also how history in relating to the environment, requests relevant data from geography. Generally, the History of every society is heavily influenced by its geography, for example, the earliest civilizations began in the riverine areas that had flat land like Nile and Mesopotamia.

Music equally has an intimate relationship to history. It provides evidence on the question of the spread and development of cultures, especially through drums; some drums are oracles others are broadcasting stations. The social historian in writing about civilizations, cultures, and palaces heavily relies on the records from oral tradition or document written by drummers which provide information on the meaning of different rhymes of drumming. Some songs are written in praise of folk heroes, famous monarchs and some even describe past significant events, and this could also serve as source of information to the historian.

On the other hand, Religion plays a vital role in understanding communities; their past and present in relation to the history of their religious beliefs, behaviors, and institutions. It is a fact that right from the beginning of time, humans have engaged in religious activities and beliefs, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Traditional religion, etc. Invariably, a historian who is to reconstruct the history of the religious belief of any community must be familiar with the religion of that community, and must also seek necessary information from the followers of a particular religion or books written by the scholars of that religion.

History and Social sciences share so many things in common. Claude Ake relates that, “The Social sciences cannot accomplish the task of providing systematic explanation of the social world without operating within the framework of historical analysis.” Similarly, Historians
sometimes utilize the insights from the concepts defined by social science disciplines such as Political science, Public administration, Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, Psychology, etc. These are the Social science disciplines the historian uses in his multidisciplinary approach in the writing of history.

Physical and Natural Science is a subject that deals with calculations and machines for finding the results of certain problems. It therefore, helps the historian to showcase events on the scale they occurred and new methods of quoting percentages of events or population through help of the people who are involved in his research through the help of the computer.

In the same vein, the use of the historical demography namely-information regarding the movement of people, births and deaths, fertility rates, immigrations, cannot be possible without the ways to process and correlate the vast and complex data made available by diverse official records. “This type of detailed study enables the historians to understand the various facts of the past life.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, the adoption of multidisciplinary approach in the study of history and other discipline is important in the following ways, as outlined by Akombo (2019):

1. It creates creativity in historical research, that is, creates the ability to explore diverse fields in our efforts to create historical knowledge.
2. Many intellectual, social, economic and political problems require multidisciplinary approach to be solved.
3. It reminds us of the unity that exists among diverse intellectual fields or disciplines.
4. It provides the historian with the opportunity to delve into other disciplines in the course of his research thereby enabling him/her to appreciate the relevance of other disciplines to history.
5. It demonstrates or expresses the connection or bond between disciplines, which permits cross border navigation in search for knowledge.
6. It deepens the Historian's perspectives in learning or research by delving into diverse disciplines in the course of research.
7. It provides opportunity to the Historian to exercise academic or intellectual freedom in the course of research, that is, the freedom to explore other disciplines in the course of research.
Conclusion

The rapport between history and other disciplines has opened up new views of knowledge, as well as increased the frontiers of research not only in the Humanities but also in the Social sciences. It is a bond that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved. What is required is that the researcher in any given field should be aware of what other scholars in other disciplines are doing, and should be well abreast with the techniques and language used in those disciplines to allow him make proper use of the results of studies inthem.

Endnote
1 https://www.dictionary.com/browse/multidisciplinary
3 https://www.definations.net
15 Ake, cloude social science as imperialism 1979 p 50 ibadan university press
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