

## Factors Influencing Secondary School Students' Attrition in Geography in Esan West Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study examined the issue of secondary school students' attrition in geography in Esan West Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. Data were obtained from relevant government bodies and field survey (through the administration of structured questionnaire) and analysed descriptively. The results showed that student's interest in geography as a subject of study is generally high and consequently not a factor in its attrition. However inadequate teachers and lack of requisite teaching facilities/aids is a major factor that translates into poor teaching of the subject and by implication students' unwillingness to offer it. The study further revealed that although the scope of geography syllabus is generally acceptable, there could indeed be a need to reduce it. Parental influence on future career choices of students and consequently the selection of subjects to offer was found to be high. The study recommends for the training of geography teachers in required quantity and quality; emplacement of capacity building programmes; provision of adequate teaching facilities/aids; review of the subject curriculum and guidance and counselling of students on geography related career opportunities.

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**Keywords:** geography, attrition, secondary school, students, interest, choices

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### INTRODUCTION

Students' retention in any academic discipline is a priority concern of education planning and management. Students' retention in a given academic discipline is no doubt increasingly becoming a matter of economic survival in contemporary societies. This is particularly pivotal to students' choice of course of study at the tertiary level of education. The dwindling level of students retention in a given subject or course of study is often termed *attrition*. High levels of attrition have been become evident in some subjects at the secondary school level of education and consequently transferred to the tertiary level of education in contemporary Nigerian society. This has triggered a keen competition among prospective tertiary education students for the so-called lucrative courses of study, while others often have to scramble for students. One of the subjects that have been experiencing attrition at the secondary level of education and by inference the tertiary level too in Nigeria is Geography.

A survey of students' choice of subjects and the position of geography at school certificate level became necessary in order to properly diagnose the problem of attrition in the subject. Although the overall philosophy and objectives of education in Nigeria states among others: the integration of the individual

into a sound and effective citizen and equal education opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, several factors however influence individual decision and choices. According to Akintade (2011) the term *influence* refers to the ability to produce an effect that affects the character of a person and *choice* refers to the right to choose and or the ability to select out of a number of things and take a decision: In consequence therefore, the choice of geography by students is influenced by the dynamics of socio-economic and some related personal factors.

Geography has been experiencing high level of attrition of students at the senior secondary certificate examination level in Nigeria. This is evidenced by decline in the yearly number of students' enrolment for geography and their lack of keen interest in geography as a school subject as shown by Akintade (2011)'s study at Ilorin; which is quite at variance with the findings of Adeyemi (2009) who observed that more students opt for geography from the list of available optional subjects in Botswana. Among the various reasons that have been adduced to be responsible for this decline are the general lukewarm attitude of students to the study of geography at the secondary school level (Olanipekun, 1988); teacher's attributes and relationship with pupils and students

(Zarei and Sharifabad, 2012) and Sabitu and Nuradeen, 2010); teachers attrition ((Egu, Ogbonawuju and Chionye, 2011); student’s attributes, peer group and parental influence on the choice of subject and the job prospect of geography (Akintade, 2011); the nature of geography curriculum; the inability of social studies taken at the junior secondary school level to cater for the need of geography at the senior secondary school level (Olanipekun, 1988); and inadequate provision of geography materials such as laboratories, books and equipment in schools.

In Esan West Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria evidence of attrition of secondary school students in the choice of geography at the senior secondary school and in particular senior school certificate examination enrolment abounds. Sequel to the foregoing, this paper focuses on a study of the analysis of the factors responsible for the attrition of secondary school students in geography, (as no known study has so far addressed the issue in that tier of education in the area); and consequently correlate the findings with those of similar studies in other areas.

**METHODOLOGY**

For this study data on the number, names and location of all secondary schools in Esan West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, as well as information on student’s attrition in geography in the aforementioned schools were collected. The former was obtained essentially from the Ministry of Education unit of the Esan Local Government Area Council, while the latter was obtained through field survey that entailed the administration of structured questionnaire to respondents in the sampled secondary schools. Two sampling techniques were adopted in this study: Purposive sampling was used to select schools that offer geography as one of their subjects of study in SSS and students offering geography. Random sampling method was used in selecting from among the students those to be administered questionnaire to. The structured questionnaire elicited information on personal characteristics of the respondents, student’s interest in geography, the teaching of geography to students, students opinion about geography syllabus, students choice of career prospects as well as knowledge of career prospects in geography. Data collected were analysed mainly through descriptive statistical methods.

**RESULTS**

A total of 119 students (made up of 59 male or 49.58% and 60 female or 50.42%) responded to the questionnaires administered. Majority (48 or 40.34%) of the respondents were Senior Secondary School 2 students (SSS2): This is followed by SSS3 students who were 45 in number making 37.81% of the

sampled students, while SSS1 had the least with 26 students or 21.85%.

Generally, students interest in geography is high (41 respondents or 34.45%) or moderate (34 respondents or 28.57%). Only 30 respondents (25.21%) claim to have very high interest in geography. Likewise, 3.36% and 5.88% respectively have low and very low interest in geography (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1: Student’s level of interest in geography

Level of Interest	No	%
Very High	30	25.21
High	41	34.45
Moderate	34	28.57
Low	04	03.36
Very Low	07	05.88
No Response	03	02.51
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

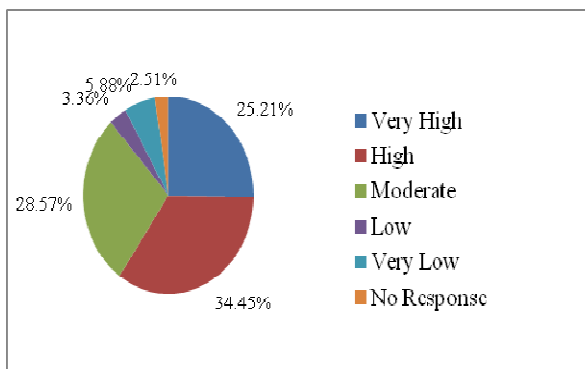


Figure 1: Student’s level of interest in geography

Table 3 shows that students find physical geography more interesting than other sub areas in geography: This was attested to by 50 (42.02%) of the respondents. Human geography with 36 responses (30.25%), map reading with 23 responses (19.33%) and regional geography with 10 responses (08.40%) followed in that order. Thus the sub area that the students have least interest in is regional geography.

Table 3: Sub area in geography found more interesting by students

Area in geog.	No	%
Physical Geog.	50	42.02
Human Geog.	36	30.25
Regional Geog.	10	08.40
Map Reading	23	19.33
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Flowing from the previous result, majority of the respondents (51 or 42.86%) said that they understand physical geography better: Similarly, 37 (31.09%) understand human geography better, 18 (15.13%) understand map reading better and 13 (10.92%) understand regional geography better (Table 4).

Table 4: Sub area in geography better understood by students

Area in geog.	No	%
Physical Geog.	51	42.86
Human Geog.	37	31.09
Regional Geog.	13	10.92
Map Reading	18	15.13
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

According to 45 (37%) of the respondents, their level of performance in geography (assignments, tests and exams) is very good. Table 5 and Figure 2 as well shows that 39 respondents (32.77%) claim to have excellent grades, while 26 (21.85%) have good grades. No one claimed to have fail grades, while 6 (5.04%) and 3 (2.52%) respondents said they have fair and poor grades respectively.

Table 5: Student’s opinion on general level of performance in geography

Performance	No	%
Excellent (A)	39	32.77
Very Good (B)	45	37.82
Good (C)	26	21.85
Fair (D)	06	05.04
Poor (E)	03	02.52
Fail (F)	00	00.00
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

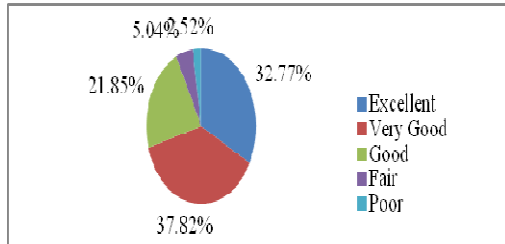


Figure 2: Student’s opinion on general level of performance in geography

Further assessment of students’ performance show that students generally do better in physical geography: this was the opinion of 52 (43.70%) of the respondents. Human geography with 31 responses (26.05%) and map reading with 18 responses (15.13%) comes second and third respectively in terms of students’ performance. Table 6 shows that the least performance is in regional geography (15 or 12.61%).

Table 6: Students’ performance in the sub areas of geography

Area in geog.	No	%
Physical Geog.	52	43.70
Human Geog.	31	26.05
Regional Geog.	15	12.61
Map Reading	18	15.13
No Response	03	02.52
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Regarding the teaching of geography, majority of the respondents (105 or 88.24%) claimed to have only one geography teacher in their school. Only 13 respondents (10.92%) claimed that they have two geography teachers in their school. Furthermore, majority (45 or 37.82%) of the respondents expressed moderate level of satisfaction with the teaching of geography in their school, while 31 (26.05%) said their level of satisfaction is high and 25 (21.01%) further claimed to have very high level of satisfaction (Table 7 and Figure 3).

Table 7: Level of satisfaction with the teaching of geography

Level of satisfaction	No	%
Very High	25	21.01
High	31	26.05
Moderate	45	37.82
Low	13	10.92
Very Low	05	04.20
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

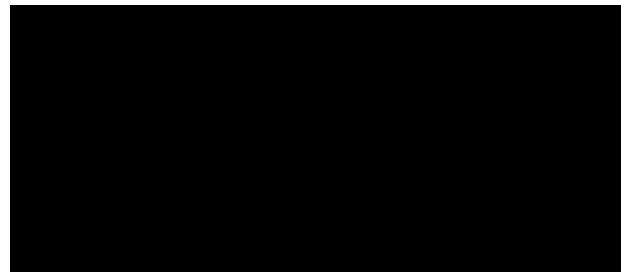


Figure 3: Level of satisfaction with the teaching of geography

Table 8 shows that majority (43 respondents or 36.13%) of the schools have three periods or geography lessons a week; 31 (26.05%) respondents claim to have four; and 24 respondents (21.17%) said they have two periods. However, 4 (3.36%) respondents claim to have five periods of geography lesson in a week, while 1 (0.84%) respondent claim to have only one in period a week. A typical period or lesson last for between 30 to 45 minutes.

Table 8: Number of geography lessons in a week

Number of periods	No.	%
One	01	00.84
Two	24	21.17
Three	43	36.13
Four	31	26.05
Five	04	03.36
No response	16	03.45
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

According to the respondents physical geography is better taught than other sub areas in geography. Table 9 shows that 46 (38.65%) respondents claim that physical geography is better taught, 30 (25.21%) opted for human geography, 28 (23.53%) choose map reading and the least 15 (12.61%) went for regional geography

Table 9: Sub area of geography better taught

Sub area in geog.	No.	%
Physical Geog.	46	38.65
Human Geog.	30	25.21
Regional Geog.	15	12.61
Map Reading	28	23.53
Total	119	

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Ironically map reading (and not regional geography) was adjudged by majority (68 or 57.14%) of the respondents to be the area not well taught in geography. Regional geography comes next (21 respondents or 17.65%), followed by physical geography (16 respondents or 13.45%) and lastly human geography (14 respondents or 11.76%). Details are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Sub area of geography not well taught

Area in geog.	No.	%
Physical Geog.	16	13.45
Human Geog.	14	11.76
Regional Geog.	21	17.65
Map Reading	68	57.14
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

Among the academic exercise given to the students, classroom work rank highest with 89 response (74.79%); followed by homework/assignment (74 responses or 62.18%), map work (22 responses or 18.49%), practical (16 responses or 13.45%), project work (13 responses or 10.92%), excursion/field trip (8 responses or 6.92%) and visit to weather station (5 responses or 4.20%) in that order (Table 11 and Figure 4).

Table 11: Academic exercises done by students

Exercise	No.	%
Class work.	89	74.79
Homework/Assignment	74	62.18
Practical	16	13.45
Visit to Weather Station	05	04.20
Map Work	22	18.49
Excursion/Field Trip	08	06.92
Project Work	13	10.92
Number of Students	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

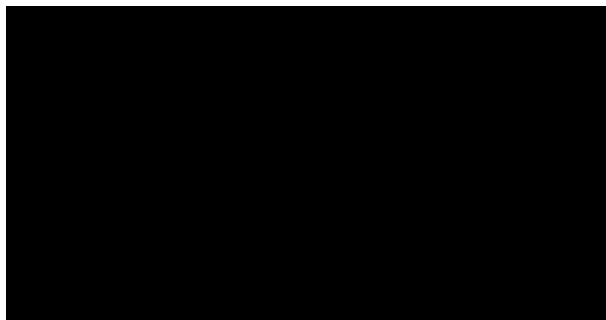


Figure 4: Academic exercises done by students

Table 12 and Figure 5 shows that majority of the respondents (78.99%) agreed that they have relevant

geography textbooks, 47 (39.49%) said they have atlases and other maps, and while 21 (17.65%) respectively claimed to have topographical maps as well as measuring tapes. Only 18 (15.13%) of the respondents claimed that their schools have geography laboratory. Weather station which is a very important requirement for teaching geography is only available in very few schools as opined by 8 (6.72%) of the respondents. Other facilities/aids available in the schools are globes (11 respondents or 9.24%), ranging poles (4 respondents or 20%) and prismatic compass (3 respondents or 2.52%).

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Table 12: Facilities/Aids used in teaching geography

Facility/Aid	No.	%
Geography Laboratory	18	15.13
Relevant Textbooks	94	78.99
Atlas/other Maps	47	39.49
Topographic Maps	21	17.65
Weather Station	08	06.72
Measuring Tapes	21	17.65
Prismatic Compass	03	02.52
Globes	11	09.24
Ranging Poles	05	04.20
Number of Students	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

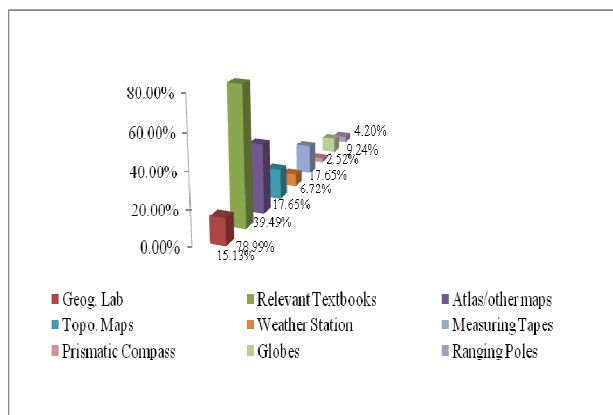


Figure 5: Facilities/Aids used for teaching geography

On the issue of geography syllabus respondents majorly 60 respondents (50.42%) feel that the syllabus is satisfactory, while 58 (48.74%) thinks that the syllabus is too wide. Despite the forgoing,

majority of the respondents (39 or 32.77%) feel that it is not easy to cover the syllabus, 24 respondents (20.17%) opined that it is easy, while 18 respondents (15.13%) asserted that it is moderately easy to cover the syllabus. However, majority of the schools as opined by 66 (55.46%) of the respondents are actually able to cover the syllabus, while 53 respondents (44.54%) claim that they are not able to cover the syllabus. Consequently, majority of the respondents (68 or 57.14%) feel that the scope of the syllabus should be reduced, while 51 respondents (42.86%) opined that the scope of the syllabus should remain as it is.

It is pertinent to note however, that most of the respondents are of the opinion that geography is relevant in their choices of future career. Sixty-five (54.62%) of the respondents believe that geography is relevant in their preferred choice of career, while 51 (42.86%) think otherwise. As shown in Table 13 the various professions the respondents claim to know to be associated with geography are varied. These include: land surveying (72 respondents or 60.50); urban and regional planning (65 respondents or 54.62%); military (55 respondents or 46.22%); building (55 respondents or 46.22%); architecture and estate management (51 respondents or 42.86%); farming and water/land transportation (45 respondents or 37.82%); and teaching (44 respondents or 36.97%). Other areas are civil service, police, paramilitary, business, banking, medicine, aviation, broadcasting/mass media and communication.

Table 13: Awareness of Career Prospects in Geography

Career Prospect	No.	%
Teaching	44	36.97
Civil Service	28	23.53
Military	55	46.22
Police	22	18.49
Para Military	26	21.85
Business	14	11.76
Farming	45	37.82
Banking	10	08.40
Medicine	17	14.29
Building	53	44.54
Estate Management	51	42.86
Architecture	51	42.86
Urban and Regional Planning	65	54.62
Aviation	27	22.69
Land/Water Transportation	45	37.82
Broadcast/Media Services	12	10.08
Communication	20	16.81
Land Surveying	72	60.50
Number of Students	119	

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

The application of Geoinformatic techniques (remote sensing, geographic information systems (GIS), global positioning system - GPS) in geographic studies have no doubt enhanced the prospects of geography in career choices. It is however unfortunate to note that only 29 respondents

(29.41%) claim to be aware of the existence of such sub areas in geography; 73 respondents (61.34%) are ignorant of the existence of such areas.

Regarding parental influence, 73 respondents (61.34%) opined that their parents influences their choice of future career, while 42 (35.29%) disagrees. Parent's influence on choice of future career is generally believed to be usually very high (49 respondents or 41.18%) where it exist. Similarly, 29 respondents (34.37%) says such influence is high, while 12 (10.08%) opined that the influence is moderate (Table 14 and Figure 6)

Table 14: Level of parental influence on career choice

Level of Influence	No.	%
Very High	49	41.18
High	29	34.37
Moderate	12	10.08
Low	03	02.52
Very Low	05	04.20
No Response	21	17.65
Total	119	100.00

Source: Fieldwork, 2012

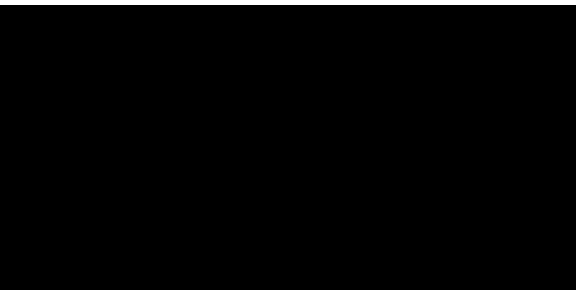


Figure 6: Level of parental influence on career choice

**DISCUSSION**

Generally 88.23% of the students have between moderate to very high interest in geography. Therefore, students' interest in geography could be said to be high. The students generally agreed that they find physical geography more interesting, followed by human geography and map reading in that order. The implication is that students find regional geography less interesting. This could be due to the fact that regional geography is often taken last in the geography scheme of work and indeed unlike other areas (specifically, physical and human) only few books exist in regional geography. Sequel to the foregoing, the students as well adduced that they understand physical geography better, followed by human geography, map reading and regional geography being the least understood.

Students performance in geography (assignments/homework, tests, practical and examinations among others) is on the average very good. For example over seventy per cent claim to score A grades (52.77%) and B grades (37.82%) in geography academic works. Indeed 92.44% usually have between C to A grades in such exercises. It

suffices to note that the acclaimed performance of the students could not be verified in the field. It is also pertinent to note that the acclaimed pattern of performance is line with that of areas of interest in geography. Thus, the students adduced that they perform better in physical geography, followed by human geography, map reading and lastly regional geography.

Adequacy of teaching staff and facilities/aids are fundamental in the effective teaching and development of any given subject. This study has revealed that majority of the schools (according to 88.62% of the respondents) in Esan West Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria have only 1 geography teacher. Indeed many schools in the study area could not be sampled simply because they do not offer geography due primarily to unavailability of requisite geography teachers. Indeed there have not been enough teachers to meet the demands of the ever-increasing number of students and pupils especially in Nigeria (Egu; Ogbonna-wuju and Chionye, 2011). Okunrotifa (2008) also noted that the quality of teaching offered in our schools is also a major problem. In particular teacher's knowledge plays a significant role in the classroom as it affects the choice of appropriate strategies during the teaching process (Zarei and Sharifabad, 2012). Studies carried out in Nigeria by Rena, (2000); Elochukwu, (2001); Bangbade, (2004); Alimi and Balogun (2010); and Sabitu and Nuradeen (2010) showed positive relationship between teachers' attributes (in terms of knowledge of the subject matter, communication ability, and interest in the job, emotional stability among others) and student's academic performance in geography.

Consequently, the students have moderate (37.82%) satisfaction with the teaching of geography, while 26.05% said they have high satisfaction and only 21.01% are highly satisfied. The inadequacy of geography teachers could also be the reason why majority of the schools only have two to three geography lessons in a week. Olanipekun, (1988) had earlier decried the acute shortage of geography teachers in secondary schools in Nigeria.

In line with students' area of interest in geography, it was as well observed that the area students felt is better taught is physical geography. This is perhaps why students have developed more interest, have higher level of comprehension and performance in it. Indeed physical geography is the area in geography that students are introduced to first. Human geography, map reading and lastly regional geography come in that order in terms of area well taught. Ironically, however, map reading rather than regional geography turn out to be the area most (57.14%) students feel is not well taught. No doubt map reading is quite interesting if well taught. It is

common to hear secondary students complain about their inadequacies in map reading. This is largely due to inept, ill-equipped and sometimes outright non-teaching of map reading to students. Indeed, many schools don't have topographical maps required for map reading. For example, this study revealed that only 18.49% of the respondents opined that they do map work exercises in their schools. The main exercises done are class work (74.79%); followed by homework/assignments (62.18%). It is also worthy to note that only 4.20% of the respondents claimed to have visited weather station despite the overwhelming importance of such exercise in geographic studies. This is, in fact a corroboration of the non-availability of such facility. Although, 6.72% of the respondents claim to have weather station in their school, it is doubtful whether such facility actuality exists and if it does may not be functional. The common teaching facilities/aids in the schools are relevant textbooks (79.88%), atlases/other maps (39.49%) and to a lesser extent topographical maps (17.65%). All these culminates in poor quality teaching as outlined in earlier works by Ofeigbu, (2004), Okunrotifa, (2008) and Sabitu and Nuradeen (2010).

Despite the orchestrated wide scope of geography syllabus, many of the respondents (50.42%) feel that the scope is satisfactory, while 48.74% say the scope is too wide. However, majority of the respondents (32.77%) opined that it is not easy to cover the syllabus and that the level of understanding of the topics in the syllabus is moderate (47.96%) and at times high (26.05%). It is nonetheless gratifying to note that majority (55.46%) of the respondents asserted that their schools were able to cover the syllabus: Despite this, 35.29% of the respondents would advocate for a reduction in the scope of the syllabus given the opportunity for adjustment, while 32.77% would let it remain as it is. The size of geography syllabus can be said to be tolerable to the extent to which it is comparable in scope and content to other competing subjects (such as economics, government and history), which psychologically have been assumed by many teachers and students to be less difficult than geography and indeed a psychological warfare exist between teachers and students who still carry the notion that geography is a difficult subject (Olanipekun, 1988). Akintade (2011) further observed that except proper control is exercised, it is impossible to cover the scope of geography, no matter the length of the course. This he noted has contributed to the poor perception of geography as a school subject by students hence, their (students) not wanting to offer the subject. However, Akintade (2011) noted that in spite of the nature of geography curriculum that it is usually a pleasure to learn with the right attitude.

Majority of the respondents (54.62%) believe that geography is relevant in their preferred choice of career. It was as well discovered that parents do influence to a large extent the students choice of future career and consequently subjects to take. Where such influence exists, it is often very high irrespective of the parents' level of education. Hickman, Greenwood and Miller (1995) and Wafula, (2012) have expressed the influence of parents in their children and wards choices of career. Previous studies have indicated that the job prospect of geography related professions is closely linked to why parents influence some of their children choices and the choice of geography as a school subject (Akintade, 2011). Consequently, Handyside, Murray and Mereoiu (2012) have observed that teacher preparation programs should focus on providing their candidates with meaningful opportunities to learn about and practice developing partnerships with families

It is appalling to note that majority of the respondents (61.34%) are not aware of the newly emergent areas (remote sensing, geographic information and global positioning systems) in geography. It suffices to note that these new areas are making geography more relevant in national development and consequently enhance career opportunities for geographers who acquire the requisite skills. This portends poor career counselling and poor relationship between the students and teachers which as recognised by Rena (2000), Alimi and Balogun, (2010) and Akintade (2011) could adversely affect the choice of subjects offered by students.

## CONCLUSION

It is shown from the results of this study that students find geography an interesting subject, particularly physical geography and to a lesser extent, human geography, map reading and regional geography in that order. Thus students' attitude to the subject is not really a factor in its attrition. On the contrary, teaching staff and teaching facilities/aids are grossly inadequate. For example most of the schools in the study area have only one geography teacher and many do not have at all and consequently cannot offer the subject to their students: Worse, is that those who offer geography lack basic facilities/aids required to effectively teach the subject. Indeed none of the secondary schools in the study area has a geography laboratory or weather station. It was also observed that although it is generally believed that the scope of geography is wide it can be adequately covered when well handled. It is also germane to note that majority of the respondents recognise the relevance of geography in their choice of future career but stress that parental influence is high in their choice of subjects and consequently career choices..

Sequel to the above this study recommends that concerted efforts should be made to produce geography teachers in required quantities and quality while capacity building programmes should be put in place to ensure continues improvement. Adequate facilities and teaching aids should as well be provided: indeed every school should have a geography laboratory and weather station with requisite equipment. Fieldwork, excursions and projects/practical works which indeed are integral components of the geography curriculum should be emphasised as they will further stimulate student's interest in the subject. A review of the SSS geography syllabus is perhaps now imperative. Many of the elementary topics in the sub areas of geography can and should be integrated into the JSS social studies curriculum. This will indeed ensure that students have rudimentary knowledge of geography at JSS, rather having their first encounter with the subject at SSS as is currently the case: Such knowledge could in fact tickle their interest in the subject. Finally, the students should be introduced to remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) at SSS and be properly guided and counsel for them to be abreast of the career opportunities therein.

It is pertinent to note that the respondents sampled in this study were limited only to Senior Secondary School students in the study area who are offering geography: this was based on the understanding that they were in a vantage position to respond to the issues raised in the study. It will however be interesting to also appraise the opinion of those students who do not currently offer the subject in order to be able to articulate a holistic approach to address the problem of attrition in the subject.

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