Introduction
The issue of the falling standard of education as well as high drop-out rate in Nigeria, as in most developing African countries, is well known. The trend has been expressed with fervour in several quarters, inside and outside the school environment. Historical scholarship, in particular, has, in the last couple of decades since the mid-1980s, been experiencing a serious crisis of relevance, which threatens the discipline with extinction. The crisis is indeed manifested at all levels and in all aspects of historical scholarship in Nigeria, one of the most visible of which is at the apex of the professional association of Nigerian historians, namely, the Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN). Today, the crisis has reached a depressing point such that in many secondary schools, history as a subject is no longer taught, and in the few schools where the subject is offered, the number of history students is embarrassingly low. What happens at the secondary school level is transferred to the tertiary institutions where recently many history departments modified their names to reflect the mood of the society. Thus we now have such nomenclatures as History & Diplomatic Studies, History & Strategic Studies, History & International Studies etc. Besides, the number of applicants who made history their first choice course of study at both the undergraduate and graduate levels has dwindled considerably in the recent past. The situation is such that calls for serious stock-taking and sober reflection, in order to arrest the trend.

The need to rekindle students’ interest, and thus improve their performance in history, in particular, and other academic subjects has been stressed by scholars, educationists, teachers, politicians, parents and policy makers. For several reasons – ranging from poor societal perception of the subject and inadequate recognition of historians, lackadaisical attitude of governments towards the subject in particular and the humanities in general and the poor handling of the subject by the teachers themselves – most students are known to have developed a negative attitude towards learning history. Many of
those who study the subject today do so either because they do not have another subject alternative or option, or in order to complete the number of subjects required for their certificate examination registration. Where they have the choice, the majority prefer to offer Government or Political Science, or Social Studies. Even many of the few students who offer the subject perform poorly in their examinations.

Apart from the factors identified in the foregoing paragraph, one major reason for the downward trend in the study of history is that the subject is generally thought to be “too difficult”. It is believed, as Mays rightly observes, that the subject requires a maturity of thought and judgement which a young child normally does not possess. The argument is anchored on the fact that since the power of deduction and abstract reasoning does not develop much before the age of sixteen, history cannot be effectively taught to children before this age. However, while no one would expect a child in the elementary or secondary school to make the kind of historical judgement and analysis expected of an adult with his wide experience of the world, one would still expect him to be able to have a clear sense of time, give clear historical explanations and present logical historical arguments. Experience has shown that most school children lack these skills in history, and this is where the history teacher comes in. A good history teacher should improve the performance of the pupils and help to reduce the increasing lack of interest in history as a subject as well as the alarming rate of failure in history examinations.

The Need for Reforms

History faces a number of challenges in our educational institutions today. One of these is the inadequacy of teachers to handle the subject: inadequacy, not quantitatively but in qualitative terms. The tendency, therefore, has been for incompetent and unqualified hands to manage the course. Even in situations where the course is handled by qualified hands, the methodology and approaches adopted often render an otherwise practical subject dull and uninteresting. This consequently makes students develop bad attitudes towards learning the subject. The end result is poor performance in history. There is therefore, an urgent need for reform in the learning and teaching situations. Such reforms, no doubt, must begin with the history teacher. He is not only to educate student-teachers but he is also to re-educate practising teachers at all levels. The rationale is to make all history teachers appreciate the importance and relevance of appropriate methodologies. Undoubtedly, this is expected to make history more practical and more result-oriented.