

Bridging Time and Space: The Power and Purpose of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies in Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper advances a narrative of integrative knowledge, situating History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies as vital disciplinary nexuses for cultivating global citizenship and critical thought in higher education. Drawing on a thematic focus of interdisciplinarity and civic purpose, the study interrogates how this fields-often taught in isolation-can be repositioned to illuminate the interconnectedness of human experiences across time and space. It employs a constructivist theoretical framework informed by spatial humanities and critical pedagogy, asserting that knowledge production must not only reconstruct past realities but also inspire transformative engagement with the present and future. The research analyzes curriculum models, case studies, and policy frameworks from three higher institutions in the Niger Delta to explore how integrative teaching of these disciplines enables students to navigate complex global issues-conflict, migration, climate change, and diplomacy-with historical depth, spatial awareness, and ethical reasoning. It further argues that such interdisciplinarity strengthens cultural literacy and fosters empathy, thus equipping students with tools to interpret the world and act within it. The conclusion underscores that bridging temporal and spatial perspectives through these fields enriches higher education's role in shaping informed, humane, and agile thinkers. The paper recommends institutional reforms including interdisciplinary course clusters, collaborative teaching, and experiential learning models (e.g., diplomatic simulations and heritage mapping) to embed this vision. Ultimately, the study affirms that integrating History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies is not merely an academic exercise but a pedagogical imperative for preparing students to engage meaningfully in an interdependent world.

Keywords: Global Citizenship Education, Curriculum Reform, Spatial Humanities, History and Geography Integration, Interdisciplinary Higher Education.

1. Introduction

Background to the Study

In an era increasingly defined by globalization, transnational crisis, cultural interconnectedness, socio-political instability, environmental challenges, and shifting diplomatic landscapes, the integration of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies in higher education has become imperative-particularly for institutions in dynamic and resource-

rich region like the Niger Delta. These disciplines while distinct collectively empower students to critically understand the past, interpret spatial relationships, and navigate international affairs with insight and purpose. Within the academic settings of the Department of Education and Geography Education at Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education in Sagbama, Bayelsa State, and the Department of History and International Diplomacy at Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, this interdisciplinary approach is vital for cultivating locally grounded yet globally aware scholars.

History serves as the lens through which students analyze the trajectories of political, cultural, and economic transformations-offering clarity on the roots of contemporary conflicts and the evolution of regional identities. In a region like the Niger Delta, which has experienced both colonial legacies and post-independence marginalization, historical consciousness is key to social reconstruction and advocacy (Falola & Heaton, 2008). For Okoko (2012, p. 115), Geography complements this by mapping human-environment interactions, spatial inequalities, and ecological vulnerabilities. It equips students with tools to analyze issues such as oil-related environmental degradation, population movements, and urban development.

Diplomatic Studies on the other hand, focuses on negotiation, international cooperation, and cultural diplomacy, draws on both historical depth and geographical insight. As Nigeria increasingly engages in regional diplomacy across West and Central Africa, there is a growing need to prepare students-particularly from historically significant and resource-strategic regions like the Niger Delta-to participate meaningfully in Foreign Service, peace-building, and international advocacy (Ogunnubi & Okeke-Uzdike, 2016, p. 114). The fusion of these disciplines offers more than academic enrichment; it prepares students for leadership in governance, environmental justice, and cross-border cooperation.

Therefore, higher education institutions in the Niger Delta region must continue to foster interdisciplinary curricula that bridge temporal and spatial perspectives. This not only addresses local developmental challenges but also positions students to contribute to continental and global discourses. As the region contends with the legacies of colonialism, the demands of environmental sustainability, and the imperatives of regional diplomacy, the academic synergy of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies emerges as both powerful and purposeful.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study, titled *Bridging Time and Space: The Power and Purpose of History, Geography and Diplomatic Studies in Higher Education*, which posits that knowledge is not passively absorbed but actively constructed through experience, dialogue, and critical reflection (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1972). Thus, the constructivist theoretical lens is enriched by the intersections of spatial humanities and critical pedagogy, both of which challenge traditional epistemologies by situating learners as co-creators of meaning across historical, geographical and diplomatic terrains.

According to Bodenhamer, Corrigan, & Harris (2010) the constructivism theory holds that learners are central-actively engaged with the content, peers, and the environment to derive meaning that is personally and socially relevant. This paradigm aligns closely with the aims of spatial humanities, which emphasize the relational and interpretive nature of space, place, and memory.

In the context of higher education, History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies, spatial humanities enable learners to visualize and analyze how historical events, international

political boundaries, and diplomatic encounters are situated within specific temporal and spatial contexts. This spatial awareness fosters a deeper, embodied understanding of the past and its enduring relevance in contemporary global affairs.

Furthermore, the constructivist foundation as postulated by Freire (1970) is sharpened by critical pedagogy, which contends that education must be a practice of freedom-empowering students to interrogate and transform their social realities. Hence, within this framework, the production of knowledge is not a mere reconstruction of past realities but a transformative act that informs present understanding and inspires future action. Thus, this aligns with the imperative to not only teach historical acts or geographic patterns, but also to cultivate critical consciousness about diplomacy, conflict resolution, and global interdependence.

By integrating spatial humanities and critical pedagogy into a constructivist framework, this research argues that the study of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies in higher education such as Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama in Bayelsa State, Nigeria will serve a dual function: it reconstructs temporal-spatial narratives while equipping learners with the intellectual tools to engage critically and creatively with the world. The act of “bridging time and space” thus becomes a metaphor for education that is simultaneously reflective and projective-grounded in the past but directed toward societal transformation.

This framework supports the view that interdisciplinary knowledge must be dialogical and participatory, especially within postcolonial and African contexts where histories have often been silenced, geographies distorted, and diplomatic narratives externalized. A constructivist spatial-humanistic approach reclaims agency, promotes inclusion, and redefines the role of the student-not merely as a recipient of inherited knowledge but as a dynamic agent of change, capable of reimagining the future through engaged scholarship.

The Necessity of Interdisciplinary and Civic Purpose

In the evolving landscape of higher education, the imperative to bridge disciplinary boundaries and align academic inquiry with civic engagement has gained significant traction. This is particularly true in fields such as History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies-disciplines that, when integrated, possess the transformative capacity to connect temporal consciousness with spatial reasoning and global citizenship. The necessity of an interdisciplinary and civic-oriented approach lies in its ability to produce not only informed graduates but socially responsible citizens capable of interpreting the past, navigating the present, and shaping the future.

Interdisciplinarity provides a robust framework for addressing complex, real-world issues that cannot be sufficiently understood within the silo of a single discipline. Thus, History, with its focus on chronology, causality, and memory, provides critical insights into human experiences and institutional legacies. Geography offers spatial literacy and environmental awareness, helping learners understand how physical and human landscapes are interwoven. Diplomatic Studies on the other hand, contributes knowledge of negotiation, cross-cultural communication, and conflict resolution. When these disciplines converge, they cultivate a holistic worldview-enabling learner to explore how historical injustices shape spatial inequities and how diplomacy functions as a tool for transformation (Guldi & Armitage, 2014).

For Repko, Szostak, & Buchberger (2016) interdisciplinarity fosters epistemic humility and reflexivity. They posit that it challenges students to engage multiple perspectives and methodologies, nurturing cognitive flexibility and ethical reasoning. For instance, in analyzing post-colonial African borders, one cannot rely solely on political history; spatial

analysis and diplomatic theory must also inform the discussion to fully appreciate the enduring implications of colonial cartographies and international treaties. This convergence not only enhances academic rigor but also promotes intellectual empathy—a key attribute for civic participation in pluralistic societies.

On the other hand, the civic purpose of higher education underscores the role of Colleges of Education and Universities as spaces for democratic dialogue, critical inquiry, and public engagement. To Freire (1970) education should be a “practice of freedom,” he emphasized that it empowers learners to question dominant narratives, challenge structural inequalities, and participate meaningfully in the transformation of their communities. In this context, the integration of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies becomes a civic project—where students learn to analyze historical conflicts, understand the geographies of power and resistance, and envision diplomatic pathways for peace and justice.

Spatial humanities, as an emerging interdisciplinary field, support this civic orientation by emphasizing the relationship between space, place, and memory. However, according to Uche (2008) through digital mapping, place-based learning, and archival reconstruction, students engage in projects that connect local histories to global trends, making education both context-specific and globally aware. For example, as opined by Sambo, Beauty, & Umeme (2025), exploring the humanitarian diplomacy between Biafra and Gabon during the Nigerian Civil War reveals how small nations can forge transnational solidarities through food aid and moral advocacy—lessons with profound civic implications for contemporary world.

Therefore, the necessity of interdisciplinary and civic purpose lies in their joint capacity to make education relevant, participatory, and transformative. The fusion of temporal insight (History), spatial intelligence (Geography), and global negotiation (Diplomatic Studies) offers students the tools to analyze the past, critique the present, and envision equitable futures. This approach not only meets the cognitive demands of contemporary scholarship but fulfills the ethical responsibility of education to nurture critically conscious, socially engaged, and global competent citizens.

Exploring Human interconnectedness through History, Geography, and Diplomacy across Time

The study of History, Geography, and Diplomacy is more than an academic pursuit; it is a journey into the intricate web of human interconnectedness across time and space. These disciplines, when studied in concept, illuminate the multifaceted ways in which human societies have interacted, coexisted, conflicted, and coalesced. As a subsection of the broader discourse on “Bridging Time and Space: The Power and Purpose of History, Geography and Diplomatic Studies in Higher Education,” explores the dynamic and evolving nature of human interconnectedness by tracing historical trajectories, spatial transformations, and diplomatic engagements. It underscores the significance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding the global human condition, fostering empathy, and promoting peace in an increasingly global community.

As opined by Bentley (1993), history offers a longitudinal lens through which human interaction and interdependence can be studied. From ancient trade networks such as the Silk Road and trans-Saharan routes to the Atlantic World and the post-colonial global order, historical narratives reveal how cultures have exchanged goods, ideas, religions, technologies, and people. Thus, the rise and fall of empires, colonization, and decolonization

are all pointers of the created layers of relationships that have continued to shape identities and geopolitical realities today.

According to Adas (2001) the spread of Islam and Christianity across continents was not merely a religious phenomenon but also a cultural and diplomatic one, facilitated by historical actors such as merchants, missionaries, and diplomats. Similarly, the movement of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic created enduring diasporic connections that have fostered transcontinental cultural ties, resistance movements and intellectual traditions. These historical linkages, according to Gomez, (2006) demonstrate how human experiences are interconnected across time, forming collective memories and shaping present-day solidarities. On the other hand, Geography provides spatial context in which historical and diplomatic interactions unfold. Physical features such rivers, mountains, deserts, and oceans have historically enabled or hindered human mobility, cultural exchange, and conflict. For Livingstone (1992) human geography, in particular, helps us understand the socio-spatial arrangements that facilitate interconnectedness, such as urbanization, migration, border formations, and spatial inequalities. However, the development of trade cities like Timbuktu, Venice, Istanbul, and Singapore illustrates how geography can serve as a crucible of cultural fusion and economic interdependence.

In accordance with the information above, Prescott (1987) informs that geographical proximity and ecological interdependence have compelled neighbouring communities to engage in cooperative strategies for resource management and conflict resolution, often giving rise to informal diplomacy or “borderland diplomacy”. Thus, in the context of climate change, contemporary geography continues to redefine interdependence as nations face shared environmental vulnerabilities and engage in transnational collaborations.

Whereas, diplomacy functions as both a practical mechanism and an ideological framework for negotiating coexistence among human communities. From traditional emissary systems in pre-modern African and Asian societies to contemporary multilateral diplomacy under institutions such as the United Nations, diplomatic practices have evolved to reflect the complexities of human interaction across cultures and borders (Sharp, 2009).

Murithi (2005) informed that historical diplomacy, such as the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 which laid the foundation for the modern global system, while regional diplomacy in Africa, through the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and later the African Union (AU), demonstrates efforts to foster continental solidarity and integration. For Cull (2008) cultural diplomacy, as a sub-field, has gained prominence in promoting soft power and mutual understanding through education, art, and food. Hence, these diplomatic engagements-whether bilateral or multilateral, formal or informal-underscore the need for cooperative approaches to global challenges.

Accordingly, incorporating history, Geography, and Diplomacy in higher education fosters a holistic understanding of human interconnectedness. This interdisciplinary synergy prepares students to critically analyze complex global phenomena, appreciate cultural diversity, and engage as informed global citizens. The Nigerian educational context, for instance, benefits from curricula that integrate historical analysis, geographical awareness, and diplomatic reasoning in resolving inter-group conflicts and fostering national integration (Aluede & Aluede, 2015).

Moreover, such interdisciplinary education cultivates transferable skills such as critical thinking, comparative analysis, spatial reasoning, and conflict resolution-skills essential for navigating and shaping an interconnected world. In an era of global crises ranging from

pandemics to forced migration and climate change, the ability to draw connections across disciplines is not merely academic but existential.

Hence, exploring human interconnectedness through History, Geography, and Diplomacy offers profound insights into the nature of human relationships across time and space. These disciplines, individually robust and collectively synergistic, serve as vital tools for understanding the past, navigating the present, and envisioning the future. As higher education seeks to bridge temporal and spatial divides, embracing this interdisciplinary approach is imperative for cultivating empathetic, globally literate, and diplomatically competent citizens.

The Necessity of Interdisciplinary and Civic Purpose

In a world increasingly defined by complexity, uncertainty, and interdependence, higher education must move beyond disciplinary silos to prepare students for real-world challenges. The convergence of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies illustrates how interdisciplinary learning cultivates holistic understanding and informed civic engagement. These fields, when integrated, not only bridge time and space but also foster the intellectual versatility and civic responsibility essential for 21st-century global citizens. Thus, emphasize is how these approaches enhances academic inquiry, social relevance, and the capacity for transformative action.

For Klein (1990) interdisciplinary education is no longer a pedagogical luxury but a necessity. Hence, defines interdisciplinarity as the process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline. To Sambo & Ebeku (2018); Sambo & Etire, (2017) problems such as climate change, migration, conflict, and dreadful epidemic virus have defied the boundaries of single disciplines which require students to integrative thinking to navigate their complexity. However, in the context of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies, interdisciplinarity enhances both depth and breadth by combining temporal insight, spatial reasoning, and negotiation strategies.

A classic example is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which cannot be fully understood through the lens of diplomatic history alone; it requires geographical analysis of territorial disputes and historical understanding of national narratives. Hence, this integrative approach equips students with the analytical flexibility to approach issues from multiple perspectives, fostering intellectual humility and critical judgment (Repko et al, 2019).

Alongside interdisciplinarity, civic purpose is central to the educational mission. Civic education entails cultivating the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in democratic life. Boyte & Hollander (1999) argue that civic engagement in universities should go beyond volunteerism to include “public work” that links classroom learning with real-world problem solving. History, Geography, and Diplomacy, when taught with civic intent, empower students to understand the roots of injustice, the dynamics of global inequality, and the tools available for peaceful change.

For example, teaching African colonial history or Cold War geopolitics within a civic framework can prompt students to question contemporary power structures, advocate for reparative justice, or engage in policy analysis. Geography’s spatial tools {e.g., GIS} can be used to map environmental injustice or urban disparities, turning academic knowledge into instruments of social advocacy (Harvey, 2000).

Diplomatic studies, meanwhile, can help students understand negotiation, compromise, and multilateral cooperation as civic skills with local and global applications. The disciplinary trio of History, Geography, and Diplomacy offers a natural framework for interdisciplinary and civic learning. History provides the longue duree-deep time perspectives that allow students to see the origins and consequences of current crises. Geography contextualizes those crises spatially and environmentally, demonstrating how location, place, and space shape human experiences. Diplomacy offers both the theory and practice of negotiation, communication, and conflict resolution-tools essential for civic action and leadership.

For instance, teaching students about the 1994 Rwandan genocide through a multidisciplinary lens helps them understand the colonial legacies {History}, ethnic geography and refugee displacement {Geography}, and the failures of international intervention {Diplomacy}. Such case studies not only demonstrate the value of interdisciplinary education but also engage students morally and politically, prompting them to reflect on responsibility, ethics, and collective action.

Despite its merits, the integration of interdisciplinary and civic education faces institutional and epistemological barriers. Traditional academic departments are often resistant to curriculum reforms that challenge disciplinary autonomy. Assessment methods may not adequately capture the complexities of interdisciplinary or civic learning outcomes (Newell, 2007).

However collaborative teaching models, capstone projects, community-based research, and thematic courses, for instance “Borders and Belonging,” “Global Justice” offer promising pathways.

Moreover, digital tools and platforms-ranging from virtual diplomacy simulations to historical mapping applications-can bridge theoretical learning with practical civic applications. The global COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing climate crises have further revealed the necessity of equipping students with interdisciplinary tools and civic consciousness to participate meaningfully in shaping the future. Thus, we posit that by integrating History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies, institutions can cultivate students who are not only knowledgeable across disciplines but also committed to social responsibility and ethical engagement. This fusion aligns with the broader purpose of higher education: to prepare individuals who can bridge time and space, knowledge and action, scholarship and citizenship. In doing so, it reaffirms the power of education as a force for understanding and change in an interconnected world.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The interwoven disciplines of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies serve as essential tools for interpreting the past, understanding the present, and forecasting future societal dynamics. This study has demonstrated that these fields collectively contribute to a holistic educational framework that equips students with critical thinking skills, spatial awareness, cultural sensitivity, and global diplomatic competence. Through historical analysis, learners understand the trajectories of social, political, and economic institutions; through geographical education, they comprehend spatial relationships and environmental challenges; and through diplomatic studies, they acquire tools for negotiation, conflict resolution, and international cooperation (Ajayi, 2020; Nwankwo, 2018).

As opined by Obasi & Eze (2021), the integration of these disciplines in higher education bridges both temporal and spatial divides. History fosters temporal continuity by helping learners make sense of transformations over time, while Geography bridges spatial

disjunctures, contextualizing local experiences within global trends. For Okonkwo & Ibrahim, (2019) Diplomatic Studies, in turn, connects these domains by revealing how historical events and geographical realities shape international relations and inter-group interactions. Together, they not only build disciplinary knowledge but also prepare students for civic engagement, nation-building, and global citizenship.

In an era of increasing globalization, environmental crises, and geopolitical tensions, the relevance of these disciplines cannot be overstated. Their combined pedagogical power lies in their capacity to develop well-rounded graduates who can navigate complex social realities with historical insight, geographic literacy, and diplomatic tact (UNESCO, 2023). Therefore, their purposeful inclusion in higher education curricula is critical for nurturing informed, responsible, and proactive citizens.

Recommendations

Reflecting from the analysis so far, it is obvious that by integrating interdisciplinary programmes in Universities and Colleges, designed or tailored along interdisciplinary curricula, blending History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies as joint-degree programmes or integrated general studies courses that highlight the interdependence of these fields, this paper posit that there is urgent need for policy planners of higher educational policy and the National Universities Commission should intensify effort to integrate general studies courses that highlight interdependence of these fields considering the following prescriptions.

Higher education through pedagogical innovation and experiential learning institutions can adopt experiential teaching methods such as fieldwork, historical reenactments, GIS mapping, policy simulations, and diplomatic role-plays. These methodologies will make abstract concepts tangible and enhance student engagement.

Collaboration of investment in research and publications by both government and academic institutions would help explore the synergies among History, Geography, and Diplomacy, especially in African contexts. This will enrich the global academic discourse and promote indigenous scholarship.

Education policymakers should prioritize funding and institutional support for Humanities and Social Sciences. Advocacy for their importance in national development agendas will help counteract the STEM-only focus often seen in policy circles.

Academic exchange programmes and institutional partnerships between universities across regions and continents should be encouraged. These platforms foster cross-cultural learning and the sharing of best practices in teaching and research.

Continuous professional development for lecturers in these disciplines is essential. Training in digital tools (e.g., GIS, archival software) and contemporary pedagogies will ensure the relevance and effectiveness of instruction.

Department of History, Geography, and Diplomatic Studies should organize community outreach programmes, public lectures, and heritage preservation projects. These efforts will bridge the gap between academia and society, reinforcing the real-world applicability of academic knowledge.

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