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Unity Schools, National Integration and Development in Nigeria: An Appraisal

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This article interrogates Unity Schools in the wider context of national integration and nation-building. In a bid to foster the bonds of unity among Nigerians, the government established many national Integration programmes and institutions including the Unity Schools. The study examines the importance of these schools to national cohesion. So as to unravel the ways in which these schools embraced Nigerian pluralism and cultural diversities in strengthening national unity. It is an important institution for discovering, exploring, and analysing the nature of cultural diversities, religious tolerance, and engendering oneness. This is imperative for Nigerian unity rather than uniformity. The methodology for this research is multidisciplinary in approach and historical in nature. Findings reveal that Unity Schools exemplify how new kinds of self-representation emerged and dissolved in these institutions and by extension, Nigeria. In doing so, this article contributes to remapping the historical significance of Unity Schools in national development. Traditionally segmented and distributed forms of knowledge were brought together in these schools to constitute more general history. Despite current challenges, the enduring legacies of Unity Schools remain sacrosanct. The experiment became an actual success story with some unexpectedly relevant benefits that were found by broadening search terms. The study concludes by acknowledging the relevance of institutional history to nation-building.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is made up of different ethnic groups and religious diversity. Therefore, the introduction of Unity Schools was a sure way to create understanding and tolerance among children. Here, the children learn to appreciate, accept, and respect one another across religious and ethnic lines. Unity Schools otherwise known as Federal Government Colleges are among the best public schools in Nigeria. Quality education is one of the viable tools for promoting national integration and these schools are known for that. This article thus puts Unity Schools in its proper historical and national context by highlighting the major social, economic, and political development efforts and the forces that have constrained these schools since inception. We will also highlight the invaluable human resources waiting to be properly tapped, utilised, and managed for economic growth and human flourishing. It is true that historians tend to emphasise the link between the past and the present without attempting to be prophets but we will avoid a mono-causal approach to the interpretation of this study when a multi-causal approach seems more convincing.

History/Foundation

Over the last few decades, a great number of scholars have also given broad methodological and theoretical assessments of this topic. However, our perspective is a little bit different. But before launching into that, some historical contextualisation will be necessary although the history of Nigerian development and integration is a vast topic and beyond the scope of this study, an attempt will be made to interrogate this from the perspective of unity schools.

Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914 by Lord Lugard on the devious policy of divide and rule by Britain in its imperial quest for conquest and domination. The 248 ethnic groups in Nigeria were divided against one another without their consent or due consideration for their ethnic peculiarities. In the words of Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel (2008):

We may say British imperialistic divide-and-rule represented (started) the utmost delinking of potential (the power of the people itself) from potestas (institutionalised power). This split was so complete that divide-and-rule as a form of potestas was self-reflective, self-referential, and self-grounded in its own despotic will, never relating to the Nigerian people as the owners of potentia (power-in-itself), as the primary and ultimate referential point.

After independence, Nigeria became more like an island of isolation, a wilderness of disconnections, a desert of separateness, and an empty place around which the symbolic network of nationhood was articulated. It was on this premise that Unity schools were created in a bid to foster a semblance of nationhood. As the nation sought to integrate minority communities without losing their sense of national identity vis-à-vis the dominant state/centre, they also rethought the meaning of that identity in relation to their dominant religion (Burchardt, 2020), always keeping the bigger picture in mind, never losing sight of the bigger picture.

The first federal government college in Nigeria was King's College, Lagos, founded in 1909 by the British government, and it was an all-boys school. The purpose of establishing the school was to train personnel for the establishment of the colonial

government. In 1966, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the first three Unity Schools after independence in Enugu State, Sokoto, and Warri, respectively. In 1973, General Yakubu Gowon established more unity schools in all twelve States of the Federation. (Adeosun, 2011) Every state in Nigeria has one or two Unity Schools, but Lagos State has three. Nigeria now has a total of 104 Unity Schools scattered all over the country.

The main objective of establishing Unity Schools in Nigeria by the Nigerian government was to foster unity among Nigerian children of school age from different cultural, geographical, and social backgrounds. Also, to create model secondary schools within each state, where they would admit the best brains from all the states of the federation and even other African countries. In my opinion, I still remember my Namibian classmates Emma and Tuyeni, who still maintain contact with the Alumni Association of our set till date, thanks to the internet, to ensure appreciation of each other's culture and promote tolerance. Other objectives were to foster national unity by bringing children from various backgrounds, religious, and ethnic groups of the country together in one space during their formative years when they are very impressionable, to mould them into model citizens engrained with the federal character. I think religious and cultural expressions are articulated, authorised, and institutionalised. These schools affirm existing cultural hierarchies and potentially create new modalities of coexistence. These schools are some of the best public schools in Nigeria equipped with the best academic and administrative personnel to guarantee effective productivity. They help to build a spirit of oneness among the children to foster national integration and nation-building.

This is a sure way to produce detribalised citizens of academic excellence capable of functioning in leadership capacities for the growth and development of the country because they produced men and women with a broad mindset. The aim was to harness the innate abilities of each child and

collectively apply these for societal growth. The students saw themselves as Nigerians first before any tribe. Therefore, tribal differences are of little significance to this breed of people. Since all conflicts have their origin in mind, the solution to those conflicts will also come from the mind and that is why Tamuno (1988) recommended education, more education, and yet more education as a prerequisite for any transformative change and this is taken seriously in unity schools. Tamuno (2000) opines that the importance given to education here is based on the UNESCO motto which recognises the mind of man as the key factor in matters of war and peace. By capturing the hearts of the children early and instilling in their ideas of oneness and unity, the quality of the mind is improved, and they grow up with those ideas ingrained in their hearts, expressing them wherever they go. With this kind of training, it is hoped that the children will grow up to use their minds for peace instead of war for the good of the country.

Compared to other sign systems, human life is characterised by an extraordinary degree of plasticity: we are born as much blanker slates as other animals (Amsermet & Pierre, 2007). While other brains do not come equipped with much-preprogrammed software (human newborns have few ready-made instincts to ensure their survival), they have a tremendous capacity for connectivity. Human identities are malleable: the distinctive capacity of the human brain is that it is capable of learning through socialisation, forming new connections in response to interactions (Konings, 2015). This is an experiment which worked perfectly in unity schools. The masses are the objects of history in any given society. Converting the masses into subjects of history is not a task that can be achieved by any government within a short time. Hence, the establishment of Unity Schools to gradually nurture the young ones over a long period of time into patriotic subjects. The idea is to make them become cultural ambassadors of Nigeria. The various issues raised in this study are examined

from a multi-dimensional point of view. The analysis at each stage would be based on the interplay of the treble factors of leadership, time, and circumstance, an approach adopted by Tamuno, which is a useful tool for analysis and understanding crisis as well as attempts at its resolution (Tamuno, 1989).

Nigerian Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Unity Schools

It is a well-known fact that Nigeria is a plural state. However, education changes people and people change the world. All unity schools are united by the common motto of *pro unitate*, a Latin word which means “for unity”. Indeed, just like many others, I saw unity in such friendly and brazen colours at my school, Federal Government Girls’ College, New Bussa, Kwara State. Here, unity was not just a mere slogan but a reality expressed in our daily interactions. Unity schools were created to be extremely knowledgeable in this truth and embrace it. Therefore “my understanding of pluralism is rooted in the notion of sharing”. Sharing (considered here as social not ontological or metaphysical) is both the point of departure, the presupposition, and the destiny of this concept (Wariboko, 2019). Pluralism “is in fact nothing other than the consumption, replenishing, and recreation of the spaces of sharing, the sharing of the social fabric, it is not a work to be completed, what is shared is the unworking of works” (Jean-Luc, 2013, pp. 19).

How Nigerian citizens will choose to live ethically will depend on the kind of narratives in which they make meaning out of their communities and social bonds, how they understand themselves, and how they make sense of their lives and relationships. (Wariboko, 2019). Nowhere is this truth better put into practice than in the Unity Schools. Here, the students are given a specific kind of knowledge and orientation in addition to the general knowledge given to other students their age. This knowledge is both formal and informal to create peaceful

coexistence. Indeed, human beings are storytelling animals, forming their communities and social bonds through stories, and are persons with stories in their being (Wariboko, 2019). Forget the stories of your community and you will eventually lose the community itself (Rollins, 2011). Unity schools are very fertile grounds for such storytelling passed down from one generation to another and told by the students from various communities and ethnic groups as they were told by their parents, forming a fusion, oneness, and bonding which engenders unity. A nation that neglects or ignores its history is bound to miss the valuable lessons that abound in its past. Unity schools therefore focus on an increased national understanding through a deeper and broader study of history in formal and informal settings. In fact, such a narrative enables members of the community to see that their lives and the formation of their identities find their locus in the living community that shapes them and that they in turn shape (Wariboko, 2019). This fosters the community spirit and collective responsibility as exemplified by the Unity Schools. When we share a common communal soul (that does not erase my individual freedom even as it strengthens cohesion and social bonds), then we can work for the wellbeing of one another not as those providing contract services but as those sharing their gifts for mutual flourishing (Wariboko, 2019).

Good stories are not all about intentionally socialising people into established roles or training them to be patriotic but are also about repetition and improvisation. As Traci West (2006) puts it, good stories “recognise or celebrate the events, needs, and concerns that are continuously arising from (the community)” (pp. 123). Unity Schools allow individuals to develop their unique traits, capabilities, and potentialities and also focus on how well these individual endowments are related to each other in the pursuit of the common and greater good. It gives children an equal playing field irrespective of their religious, ethnic, or social background. Indeed, out of the numerous potentially

great personages in society, only relatively few individuals in these schools lack the chance of making great marks in history. Nigeria can produce numerous outstanding personalities if purposely encouraged by the leadership through these unity schools.

Excellence is an important habit which is encouraged and nurtured in unity schools because only the best got admission into the unity schools in the past to ensure quality control. Excellence in this light is the ontological foundation of human flourishing; it is the degree to which somebody is striving for and able to affirm increasing levels of human flourishing (Spinoza, 1927). Excellence is a virtue; the highest and most prior virtue is living, acting, and doing according to one's true nature (Tillich, 2001). It is a virtue that runs like a thread through most products of unity schools and if properly harnessed can encourage cultural harmony in a plural state like Nigeria. Besides, the pursuit of excellence lays out a socio-ethical framework for organising economic development in a given society.

In line with Paul Tillich, Nimi Wariboko interprets *eros* as the umbrella Greek word for love with four components: *epithymia*, *philia*, *eros*, and *agape* (Tillich, 1954, Wariboko, 2022).

Epithymia (longing) is the desire to fulfil a need. *Philia* is the movement toward a union between equals. The part within *eros* that bears its name points to a movement of that which is lower in a scale of value toward that which is higher. *Agape* is the part of love that affirms the other unconditionally; it affirms not because the other is higher or lower, pleasant or unpleasant, desirable or undesirable. The only interest is to draw the other into a union. When *agape* is present in a relationship, it can transform and purify the other components of love and move them to their pure forms as dynamic movements of the separated to (re)union. The Platonic-Greek philosophical idea of love is not about pleasurable; it is about a creative,

dynamic, primal power that moves the world toward fulfilment and deepens relationships. (Wariboko 2022, pp. 171) It is the connection-making power in human life and the whole of the universe.

This is the kind of creative and productive love taught to children in unity schools at a very young age to foster unity and oneness among them while in school, leaving an in-print in their very young and impressionable hearts that persists into adulthood, which could be harnessed for the greater good of the country.

Jamb-lock

NATIONAL INTEGRATION/UNITY

National unity/integration is encouraging people of diverse cultures, religions, languages, and political, social, and economic systems to be brought together to have a common goal and faith in their fatherland. I believe national unity is imperative for good governance, growth, and development. National unity is vital for the overall development of a country. The increasing cultural diversity of Nigeria after amalgamation compelled the federal government to reassess the existing arrangements that regulate ethnic and cultural relations in the country. In their efforts to do so, the federal government had to navigate through competing social forces and demands, especially the mounting calls for extended minority rights and religious freedoms (Burchardt, 2020). Nevertheless, governments do not just respond to religious and cultural diversity randomly; they create and mould it through a series of epistemically and administratively defining acts (Burchardt, 2020). One of the ways they did this was to establish national institutions and inclusive unity schools.

Education is the foundation for success and quality education is also one of the instruments for promoting national unity. The fear of domination of one ethnic group by another and the distribution of the ever-shrinking "national cake" among the various units have been very thorny issues in the

Nigerian polity. National integration is important to unite minorities as well as give them the freedom to live their life the way they deem fit without undue interference. Although successive governments after the civil war have tried to resolve these problems through policies such as State and Local Government creation, Unity Schools, revenue allocation, rotational power sharing and federal character principle, these problems persist (Adeosun, 2011). Unity schools were set up with an intentional, enhanced and supported academic, social, and emotional health experience in the school setting and the larger society by living a life free of discrimination against other tribes. The unifying process of cultures in unity schools helps students improve their knowledge, skills, and wellbeing and help the children develop people skills in addition to making them open and critical thinkers. As a result, they share an uncommon and enviable bond within and across the unity schools, unmatched by any other institution, which persists even after graduation, making them relate freely with everyone.

In the words of an erudite scholar, Nimi Wariboko (2019):

“For Nigeria’s greatness we must discern, identify, retrieve, parse, open, move, create, and pursue possibilities in the various spheres in which human lives hang together. Neither our past nor our present is closed. Those of us from Africa to whom the world has said there is no hope owe it to ourselves and the rest of the world to pursue the unforeclosed and unforclosable options of existence. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to imagine what is beyond the current horizon in our current phase of life and economic development. We have to think in terms of possibility-in possibilities only.”

Indeed, unity schools train students to become agents of transformation by pressing for social justice, freedom, truth and habitually nurturing the

web of societal relations in order to advance human and capacity development to achieve the impossible. Unity Schools promote tolerance for each other irrespective of religious and ethnic affiliations.

Unity schools teach the virtues of hospitality and zero tolerance for discrimination against other tribes or religions. The point is not whether such an evaluation of their character is true or fair but the shaping of reality through the power of perception. It is true that there is no generalisation in human behaviour and there is always an exception to every rule, but in this case, the exceptions are few and far between when it comes to unity schools and the quality of their products being mostly excellent.

By accommodating children from every part of the country and giving them the opportunity to learn together, the bond of unity is created and sustained. This is imperative in an era of genetic engineering and biological and chemical warfare, in an era that has the potential for space and nuclear warfare. There is an urgent need for a philosophy that will guide the peoples of the world away from self-destruction (Uya et al., 2005), and Unity Schools have that philosophy which has been passed down through the decades. Unity schools empower children and inspire learning by educating the total child: mind, body, and spirit for the overall benefit of society. This takes cognisance of the fact that the individual is a social, cultural, and historical phenomenon. The interplay of the social and the individual suggests that the interest and contribution of the individual are better realised within a social and cultural context (Uya et al., 2005).

Unity Schools and National Development

Economic development is the creation of special and novel possibilities in an economy (Wariboko, 2022).

Social analysts insist that one of the greatest development challenges facing Nigeria is the threat to national unity. It is against this backdrop that

unity schools were established to create in the children the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and psychological conditions capable of producing growth and economic development for Nigeria. Indeed, the field of education is an area where the quantity and quality of harvest follow the type of seed used and how much care a farmer devotes to husbandry (Tamuno, 1989) and utmost care has been taken over the decades to ensure quality seeds and harvests in Unity schools. There is so much that the present policymakers could gain by utilising the products of unity schools for national integration and development. The fact remains that if we want to comprehend the destiny of economic development, we must understand the destiny of the human beings that work for its actualisation. At the minimum, economic development should involve the creation of possibilities for community and participation by all its members so that their potentialities can be drawn out for the common good (Wariboko, 2022). It is the duty of the leaders to make the most of the products of these schools for the greater good because power, as Wariboko puts it, “is the capacity, capability, or drive to actualise the potentialities of a person or group. Economic development depends on decisions and strategic interventions which should come from the right kind of leadership”. (pp. 171)

Unity Schools emphasise the necessity to tap the skills of these children and the products of these schools for the economic and technological advancement of Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Every -time we as Africans must tackle twenty-first-century economic problems by drawing from the past, our indigenous philosophies or received wisdom must be slightly expanded (Wariboko, 2022). In this case, by tapping into the human resources deliberately groomed by the government in the Unity Schools to promote our common good. These human resources could make a tremendous impact in administrative, scientific, technological, and academic sectors and beyond which could, directly and indirectly, promote the development of

Nigeria in many ways. Above all, they could leave a lasting legacy of unity in diversity at its best.

Thus, the real task for social ethicists who aspire to bring African communal ethics to face the challenges of the twenty-first century’s socio-economic development and civilisational shifts is to figure out how to create sturdy social structures, institutions, and policies that will promote fellowship as well as entrepreneurial innovativeness and self-transcending individualism-in other words, promote agonistic communitarianism (Wariboko, 2022).

One such institution created by the government to meet the aforementioned needs is the Unity School. Here, community feeling rather than personal aggrandisement helped to underpin education as the students saw it and applied it in their immediate environment and beyond. Contemporary social scientists emphasise that economic forces are often in conflict with the substance of social life, that their growth occurs at the expense of communal institutions, and that there is something artificial and, therefore, ultimately unsustainable about this process (Konings, 2015). This is largely untrue in the hearts and minds of most products of unity schools because of the values of communitarianism instilled in their young impressionable hearts; therefore, they can be trusted with higher responsibilities at all levels of society. Unfortunately, the products are not fully utilised to get the desired result which is human flourishing that would translate to economic transformation and development of the nation. Rather, human flourishing is sacrificed at the altar of the narrow interests of the government of the day. Tamuno posits that human organisations, just like nations are dynamic institutions which respond to the differential sensitive factors of Time, Circumstance and Leadership (Tamuno, 1989). These are his theory of analysis and interpretation which he considered to be the key determinants of history and factors of change, namely, Time, Circumstance, and Leadership/Followership. He kept an open mind for

a fourth factor though, which is Chance or Opportunity or Accident. These factors according to him give each known event its distinctive character, like fingerprints; they cannot be the same in any known country or epoch. Just like the ancient Greek historian Herodotus asserts, “One cannot fall into the same river twice”(pp. 66).

Indeed, Unity Schools encourage the dynamic relationship between communication, collaboration, and cooperation and the multitude that is capable of unleashing the energy (the necessary dynamism) to configure and transform society. It is a truism that people and the relationships they form can be transformed into places of excellence for individual and collective success. The speed of information flow can be accelerated in raising social capital, social trust, participatory democracy, urban–rural articulation, and physical infrastructures capable of easing the burden of interaction at all levels in the community. This kind of approach will trigger economic development at all levels of society (Wariboko. 2019).

Unexpected Benefits

Most importantly, unity schools imparted positively on the lives of most of the students because of the deliberate attention given to each child at inception. The government, teachers, and school administration invested so many resources in the students that they instilled in them the confidence to believe in themselves. I believe that the students were not only taught their subjects but were also mentored and groomed intentionally for success on a global scale. To this end, this section traces, in a selective way, the conceptual lineages/linkages of unity schools in Nigeria and the diasporic engagements and influences.

In almost every part of the globe, there is a New Bussa girl I can call upon for whatever I may need or to just connect and spend quality time with if I travel to that part of the world. From Dubai to Abu-Dhabi, to London, Australia, Canada, USA, South

Africa and beyond, I just cannot get stranded anywhere in the world. This is just one of the many unexpected benefits of attending a unity school where driven and ambitious children are raised for the global community and their level of commitment to one another is unprecedented. Some other unexpected benefits include learning to speak many Nigerian languages through daily interaction with one another in a controlled environment for many years. This has turned out to be useful to the students in their daily interaction with people from different walks of life in the wider society. The fact that most unity schools operate as a closely-knit family, supporting each other through life, leveraging on the bonds of unity and friendships formed across various states in business, politics, career and even through grief and life challenges should count for something in the current realities of an individualistic world devoid of empathy. I feel the warmth of that fellowship as I write this article alongside my co-author because I was a part of this treasured and very sacred company, a rare privilege I do not take for granted. Indeed, “at the moment we are making our ethical choice, we cannot rightly or correctly differentiate and rationally evaluate all the options and their future consequences” (Wariboko, 2019, pp. 127). There are thousands of people scattered all over the world whose lives have been touched or transformed by the training they received from the decision to establish unity schools. These people are a national treasure and are making their mark within and outside the country and could do more if they are intentionally and strategically positioned to leverage their knowledge of federal character principles and practice. The internet brings old students together from all over the world to feed off each other’s strengths and jointly mobilise towards sustaining the legacy of unity schools and the development of Nigeria.

Some ex-students of unity schools have a lot to say about their experience. In the words of Akpo Kagho, “at the time being in a unity school/boarding house felt like torture”. But the experiences and skills have

helped me along my life's journey. Two main things I tap into are firstly being able to look after myself and be independent. Secondly, being able to manage my finances, Unity schools, if well managed, I believe does help set you up for the future (pe.com, October 21, 2022). In the same vein, Ugochi Okpara had this to say, "It was a school I got to meet people from different states and a place where every state is represented to foster unity. It is a school that brings togetherness. One gets to learn about the diverse cultures of people. I do not have any regret attending such a school" (pe, com, October 21, 2022).

Unity Schools like mine (F.G.G.C. New Bussa, Kwara State) encouraged the competitive aspects of African moral philosophy, albeit healthy competition by allowing and encouraging each child to develop her unique talents within the confines of the law while also supporting each other with those same talents for the good of all. As a young girl in that era (the 1980s), I still have vivid recollections of the bond of those days amidst the social and political uncertainties occasioned by military rule and the uncertainties of the sinister times that still lay ahead, but through it all, the values and ethos that formed the foundation of unity schools and the bond of oneness that we shared kept us grounded. Writers of that period, like Habila, succinctly captured the deprivation and the stranglehold of fear that characterised life at the hands of a brutal, corrupt, and oppressive military government (Adelakun, 2022). In other words, even in such uncertain times in our history, communitarianism did not operate at the exclusion of individualism (not the narcissistic individualism at work in contemporary Western society), but the kind of individualism that allows the students to fearlessly unleash their unique talents and potentials. This is what has been described as "Agonistic communitarianism" by Nimi Wariboko (2022) in his recent book, "The Split Time... which he explained as a combination of a sense of self-interest and norm-grounded conception of common

good... it is individualism (not selfishness) that is framed within communitarianism that undergirds and propels it". (pp. 171) This is the kind of moral philosophy that shaped the child in a Unity School to foster a sense of unity and oneness in Nigeria, not uniformity but unity in line with its Motto- Pro-unity.

Current Challenges

The quality of education and infrastructure in unity schools in recent times is troubling for those who schooled there when quality was an everyday reality. I consider in the past, these schools established as model schools to be copied by state governments were lavished with resources, properly maintained, and had the best academic and non-academic staff who understood the assignment.

While the reasons for establishing them are still valid, the standard has largely waned since inception, and since unity schools came into their own, the schools still rely on the government and the ex-students to revive the lost glory and return them to the status quo. I believe that the ex-students are invested in their alma mater because the moral force of their faith in Nigerian unity impacts development in Nigeria.

Unity Schools Old Students Association (USOSA) is the umbrella body of unity schools with the sole aim of ensuring that the vision for the establishment of unity schools is kept alive despite the current challenges. It is a social network of people who heed the call for action to resuscitate the unity schools which USOSA has accepted and with such acceptance, a foundation has been laid to carry the vision around the mandate. On the 2nd and 3rd of December, 2022, USOSA held its 39th AGM in Abuja and via zoom where they had their election manifesto and election and also celebrated USOSANs vying for elective positions across all parties in Nigeria. (Tamuno 2000). This is because they believe in Nigeria as USOSANs in politics lead by doing. It is an association made up of over

500,000 members resident in Nigeria and the Diaspora and everyone's data is duly captured including occupation and location by this united Body of USOSA. They seek to promote unity in Nigeria's diversity, extend understanding and love, and foster peace while driving innovation and development. They build, channel, and exercise their power identity through community projects from their schools to the wider society, providing water, electricity, laboratories and school buildings for their schools and communities.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, an e-learning platform was designed by Study Lab for USOSA for deployment in the 104 unity schools and other schools across the country. The then President-General of USOSA, Lawrence Anirejuoritse Wilbert, disclosed this at a courtesy visit to the Minister of State for Education, Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba (USOSA, 2021).

The Yoruba word for "Internet" is *ayelujara*. Like many local words for modern artefacts and gadgets, it describes people's encounters with modern realities and the grasp of their essence (Adelakun, 2022). *Ayelujara* considers the world as a unit where things seep into each other from the holes bored into its components (Adelakun, 2022). This is a perfect image that is useful for thinking of the present globalised era; the internet technology as a part of the present world order is being fully utilised by USOSA to stay connected and mobilised for the development of their schools and the country in more ways than one, forging connections, influencing politics, and sustaining the ethos of their power identity. Facilitated by modern technological opportunities, these people mine global discourses of relevance to Nigeria at the global level through various regions and platforms across the world. In my opinion, the current President-General is Mike Magaji, and he is keeping faith with the vision of a better and unites Nigeria. This and many more activities are being done to sustain the vision of the unity schools. Nigeria needs to unite in order to fight underdevelopment and disintegration and USOSA

just might be the last hope for a united Nigeria. With the glut of technological devices and internet connection facilities linking previously disparate worlds, it is easier to mobilise for productivity in every sector, unity schools inclusive.

Beyond the umbrella body of unity schools, USOSA, there are different alumni associations of each unity school organised at the regional, national, and international levels with coordinators for each set and region to oversee the welfare and wellbeing of their members in addition to mobilising support for their alma mater. This has been beneficial to them and society in many ways. The power of networking to create wealth through leveraging on their special bond, exacerbated by the internet, has contributed immensely to societal growth and human flourishing. Personally, I believe that many Non-Governmental Organizations have also been formed by some of the former students in the medical field and other areas, touching every nook and cranny of the African continent and saving lives.

Obviously, the treble factors of Leadership, Time, and Circumstance have not worked in favour of unity schools over the years making one question the vision of the past leaders. One sure way of maintaining the quality and vision of unity schools is to ensure that they are managed by its products. Nonetheless, I think as gloomy as the picture may seem right now, the importance/relevance of institutional building as it concerns unity schools to national integration and nation-building is sacrosanct.

An Appraisal

Although this article does not do justice to the complexity of our present predicament as a nation and it is certainly not exhaustive, it does highlight the need to reflect on the role that historical context plays in our work as scholars. The need for greater self-reflection is, of course, an important ingredient for Nigerian development. This article explores a

narrower perspective of unity schools and national development within a broader rubric of national integration and nation-building.

History is an evidence-based discipline. Therefore, the four thought elements known as elements of historical thinking were fully utilised in this study and appraisal. These four thought elements include: historians think evidentially (that is, no evidence, no history); historians think analytically; historians think chronologically; and historians think comprehensively (Uya, personal communication, 2008). Federations all over the world experience differences and disruptions, but success always depends on the resolutions taken and their implementation with sincerity of purpose. The resolution taken to set up unity schools and the implementation thereof does not correspond with the reason behind the decision in the first place which is to foster unity. In other words, the level of unity encouraged in unity schools is not visible in the larger society for obvious reasons and some not-so-obvious ones. I think the government of Gowon that established more unity schools in all regions of the country had original ideas, but subsequent governments lacked the vision or desire to articulate these ideas properly and develop them meaningfully.

In fact, we could argue that many practices and ideas adopted at the inception of these schools have been hijacked by inconsistency and lack of continuity. For instance, whereas unity schools only admitted the best brains at the common entrance in the past making a case for a new ethical agenda that grants equal privilege to everyone regardless of their social or spiritual status (Adelakun, 2022), in recent times admission into unity schools are open to the highest bidder affecting the quality of intakes. Besides, subsequent Nigerian leaders could be likened to an architect trying to finish a construction using sketchy directions of the original designer and they have therefore failed abysmally in carrying on the original vision of unity schools.

Furthermore, the insecurity in the country has made it difficult for parents to send their young children far away to unity schools when there are affordable private schools nearby. The products of unity schools are the perfect kind of leaders needed in Nigeria considering the high level of educational expertise and work ethic these students imbibed in the school during their sojourn there which have largely been unimplemented at the level of the Nigerian nation. Most importantly, federal systems tend to be most vulnerable when they lack sufficient backing and fertilisation from the majority of the people required to sustain them (Gobo, 2011).

Furthermore, one of my respondents, Dr. Bisi Adigun (pe.com, October 25, 2022) had this to say, “I see all humans as one and that there is actually no difference. Everyone craves the three things-food, clothing and shelter. My attendance at unity school reinforced this, and as the old anthem says: though tribes and tongues may differ... we are all humans first”. When children have this ingrained in their hearts from a very young age, you can be sure they will turn out to be better humans than most, sensitive to the needs of others. If we reflect on our own ordinary relationships, we will recognise the deep and abiding similarities that undergird human existence and this should make us more humane. ‘When we look at the history behind the establishment of these schools which is to heal wounds and foster unity after the Nigerian Civil War, I still reap the benefit because I mix easily and freely with all Nigerians and, in fact, all races today. “A very good appraisal of the system is needed and I hope one of your conclusions will be the need of the government to maintain Unity Schools and per adventure, some may become legacy schools” (Adigun, pe.com, October 20, 2022)

“The ethos of Nigeria is in near ruins. My simple answer is that we need to focus on rebuilding our societal ethos with new narratives and good stories. Ethos concerns the operational morality of a people, their deepest presuppositions, the inner guidance system of their society that defines the mutual

responsiveness of citizens to one another that conditions the kind of relationships deemed appropriate between leadership and institutions, and evokes the necessary loyalty of citizens to leaders and systems” (Wariboko, 2019 pp. 127)

There is no gain in saying that unity schools are the best training ground for the teaching of ethos such as the practice of excellence, virtues, and capabilities that go to the core of the functioning of pluralistic communities and human flourishing like Nigeria and this should be revived. Besides, when self-identity is properly understood and handled, as it is done in unity schools, it dovetails into self-esteem which begets virtue, a much-needed ingredient for individual and societal growth. There is so much a person can do and be if he/she is not limited. Unity schools are generally known for encouraging each student to unleash his/her potential and capabilities without fear.

Who would have thought that unity schools which were once some of the best schools in Nigeria would fall from glory a few decades later to the point of mere existence? Indeed, how many of us even knew that the historical milestone achieved decades ago would become a monumental failure, or so it seems in terms of maintenance and utilising the fruits of the seeds planted over the years? Yet, I believe here we are, acknowledging the fact that barely seven decades later, the unity schools have become almost moribund and their human products are only full of nostalgic imaginations of their good old days without evidence of a unified Nigeria.

On the one hand, then, unity schools created intellectual spaces for children to specialise in different professions in accordance with their best natural skill set, identified and developed during their study years through careful nurturing and teaching, to specialise not just in the profession, but in healthy human relations, and not just in human relations, but on even narrower themes like religion (bearing in mind that religions are best thought of transformatively, as “confluences of organic-

cultural flows that... make home and cross boundaries (Tweed, 2011) and adaptability (Cabezón, 2021). And on the other, openness to such specialisation could be responsible for the success of this experiment within and outside the school.

CONCLUSION

History as a discipline which studies the past creates a better understanding of the present and serves as a compass for the future; it will certainly make us, as reasonable citizens, aware of our circumstances in society. This is the overall motive behind this study for academic and intellectual pursuit. This article is a reflection on the power identity of unity schools through the stages of evolution within Nigerian social and political contexts, using the narrative elements of history in an interdisciplinary manner/approach. However, all nations need a constant supply of peaceful and visionary leaders in quick succession to promote unity and stability by utilising all available resources and this is lacking in Nigeria.

We will end with one plea and one concluding remark/observation. For the plea this work is incomplete, we encourage its completion by other researchers and also the full return of these schools to the model schools they are meant to be with all the facilities updated. And the digital skills of the 21st century should be taught and fully utilised in keeping proper records so that we can build a more robust history of unity schools, institutional history and Nigerian development.

Now for the concluding observation/remark, it is pertinent to focus on the broad lessons to be learnt from unity schools which are more wide-ranging and crucial now more than ever in our very complex world. We need to seek out ways to relate its subject matter (the students) to more general forms of human activity, interests, and outcomes that would ensure human flourishing and development. The vision should be reassessed and sustained.

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