

**THE PAST, PRESENT AND PROGNOSIS OF HISTORY FOR  
BETTER NATIONAL TRAJECTORIES IN NIGERIA.**

**Benjamin N. NYEWUSIRA**

Department of Educational Foundations,  
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

08033157969

[ben.nyewusira@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:ben.nyewusira@uniport.edu.ng)

**Chituru NYEWUSIRA**

Department of History & Diplomatic Studies,  
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

**And**

**Eucharria U. UGWUMBA**

Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, Nigeria  
Department of Educational Foundations/Administration, Owerri, Nigeria

**Abstract**

The importance of History, even in a growing scientific world, has been gaining attention in most developed and developing countries. Unfortunately, Nigeria appears not to be fully in the league of the nations that value History; either as a subject or a social phenomenon. This paper therefore is another careful attempt to reassert the indispensability of historical lessons of the Past and Present in conjunction with proper Prognosis for desirable trends in the development of Nigeria. The other aim for revisiting the study of History, based on the templates of the Past, Present and Future, is to reawaken the importance of the subject for national survival. The paper therefore examines the reasons why the study and uses of History in Nigeria have suffered some setbacks even in the face of its utilitarian values. Consequently, the paper significantly observes that, contrary to the perception that the digital era has overtaken the values of History; the validity of scientific and digital tools is quite complementary and extremely supportive for the advancement of historical studies. Accordingly, the paper emphasizes the need for historians, historiographers and history teachers to consider and align the pedagogy for History with digital tools, in order to easily facilitate and enhance the

functional values of the subject. Finally, it submits that unless and until the government and the educational system fine-tune and give quality attention to the study and uses of History, the Nigerian society at large would not only continue to suffer serious knowledge gaps from the Past and Present, but would be mostly rudderless in the drive for discovering the pathway to a desirable future.

**Keywords:** Past, Present, Prognosis, National, Trajectories

### **Introduction**

The trends and trajectories of Nigeria's socio-economic development as a nation have been bumpy, chequered and quite ambivalent. This has led to widespread supposition that Nigeria is either a failed nation or a failing nation. Much as this assumption is contentious, there is also no utter rebuttal that the Nigeria of today is not reflective of the picture that was envisaged by its founding fathers (Ojo, 2014). And so, the nation is in dire need of the requisite knowledge of what is to be done so as not to only rescue it from its present and past failings, but to save it from the brink of national cataclysm and rightly reposition it for the task of molding a better future.

Every field of human endeavour has got its values for nation-building. Undoubtedly, education is one of such fields with its inestimable values. But then, education in Nigeria is arguably at the point where its values are fast becoming ineffectual. The simple reason for this perception is that education palpably appears not to be providing succour to the sundry challenges in Nigeria as it does for other nations. Beyond this, and whilst the debate on the general values of education rages, the study and values of history as integral part of the Nigerian educational curriculum are equally under sever threats, following the apparent lackluster posture of the educational system in pushing for the worth of the subject. In fact, Omelewa (2019, p.11) regrets that even those who have spearheaded education reforms in Nigeria "failed to understand the status and role of History in nation building"

In the same vein, the macro Nigerian society also appears to be less concerned of what becomes of the import of its history. This stems from the fact that Nigeria's socio-political trajectories are replete with instances where the country has made the same types of mistakes over

and again without tapping from the lessons of history that could have been used to circumvent such mistakes. The foregoing therefore is mostly suggestive of a mixed problem between the poor disposition of the educational system and the general public towards the subject, History.

It is in the light of the above that the necessity to deepen the knowledge of the uses of History for the Nigerian society, and for the need to align the tripod of History (Past, Present and Prognosis or Future) with national developments becomes exceedingly crucial. Herein, the concepts of the tripartite elements of History (Past, Present and Future), and why or how the study of History has suffered some setbacks also need to be thoroughly examined. Also expedient here is an attempt at unraveling how the gains of a digital age could be valid for the reversal of those setbacks, and in the strengthening of the study and uses of History. Ultimately therefore, an appraisal of the juxtaposition of history with some contemporary socio-political trajectories in Nigeria has become very imperative.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

There is no straight-jacketed way of etymologically explaining what History (as a subject) represents or indeed the things that represent history (as an event). In whatever conceptual language or construct, history covers not only all that is said and done in the past, but extends to the activities of the present and those of the predictable future. History is therefore, not just “an unending dialogue between the present and the past” (Carr, 1984, p.30), but a dialogue that spans through the triadic segments and components of time which are: the Past, Present and Future. The conceptual amplification of these components of time, in view of their nexus with history, is predicated on a deeper need to correct some misconstructions by certain scholarly thoughts that history only confines itself to the past. The need therefore to clarify the concepts of the Past, Present and Future in strict historical context becomes necessary.

### **The Past**

In history, the past typifies hitherto events that cannot be glossed or buried, notwithstanding those who wish to condemn those past events to the point where the events would be forgotten (Alagoa, 1979). In essence, the past represents events that cannot easily be erased from the realm of knowledge. It is all the things that happened, and the when, why, how or where those things happened. It is everything that had ever taken place. However, in all that must have happened, it is what is traceable, investigated, narrated or chronicled that becomes of interest to the historian. In other words, it is the reconstruction of the past that fundamentally constitute a history. The past becomes extremely vital to the individual or a society when the philosophical assertion of Cicero is properly assimilated. He said: ‘not to know what took place before you were born is to remain forever a child’ (Osokoya, 2007, p.11). Nonetheless, confining history only to the past, in the way and manner Galbraith (1990, p.4) does, by opining that “history is the Past-so far as we know it”, is a gross misconception.

### **The Present**

This depicts the nexus between what is happening and what has happened. What is happening is usually a product or consequence of what has already happened. It is the things which happened in the past that directly or indirectly inform and shape the activities of the present. It is for this particular reason that history is also described as sum total experience of the human being both in the past and present. Surprisingly, scholarly attempts, though quite unconvincing, have been made to discountenance, disentangle or even ignore the present in the chain or circle of history. Stern (1970, p.293) remarks that, for some scholars, a “present” “is as little known to historical thought as it is to philosophical thought”. But then, many literatures do not align with the idea that the present can be extricated from the process of history. Thus, Alagoa (1979, p.4) writes: “the competent historian turns to the past from his understanding of its continuity with the present so that his understanding of the present assists his reconstruction of the past”. In effect, between the concepts of the past and present, the later has also been subjected to controversies (Abdulrahman, 2014). The controversies in the misconception of the present are needless because history undeniably dovetails into the current affairs of the society (Osokoya ,

2007). In this sense, Brown (1970, p.16) asserts that “History is more the study of the Present than of the Past”

### **The Future**

The future in the study of History is mostly prognostic or extrapolative. The past provides hindsight to the historian; the present connects him to an insight, whilst the future is ultimately germane for the appropriate foresight into the unknown (Alagoa, 2009). It is natural for man and his society to long for a better future. It is the knowledge of the past and present that can appositely influence a proper prognosis of the future (Standford, 1994). However, the German historian and philosopher, Fredrich Schiller, is one of the very few scholars who are averse to idea of the future in history, insisting that history terminates with the present. It is only pertinent to remark that a denial of the future in the processes of history is synonymous with denying the historian the ability to forecast or predict, and also possibly forgetting that medieval historians did not just forecast the future “as what was likely to happen, but what was going to happen” (Ifemeje, 1988, p.29). The importance of prognosis in history therefore lies with the ability of the historian in identifying and projecting plausible cum futuristic ameliorations to the defective occurrences found in the past and present (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2017). The future is related and indeed indebted to the past, and can only be perceived or projected in the context and against the background of historical experience (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986) Thusly, without a deep sense of the past and present that glorious or desirable future of man and his society is usually at a great risk.

### **Setbacks in the Study and Uses of History**

Remarkably, in the early days of the Nigerian primary and secondary education, History was one of the subjects that students could not easily waive, especially where the students were targeting further studies in Arts, Humanities and Law or where the students were desirous of a career path in public service or politics. Sadly, it was from the 1980s that Osokoya (2000) observes that the number of students who offered History as a subject began to dwindle. The reasons for this, as suggested by Markus & Yohanna (2023) & Elewomawu (2018) include:

- ❖ Sheer lack of interest on the part of students and teachers

- ❖ Ineffective methodology in teaching and learning of history
- ❖ Insufficient availability of history text books and libraries
- ❖ Abstract nature of history/poor exposure to practical activities and historical excursions
- ❖ Dearth of archives and museums in Nigeria.
- ❖ Poor teacher preparation and inadequate motivation of History teachers.
- ❖ Increase in the emergence of historical distortions and mis-information.
- ❖ Doubts on the values of history in an emerging digital age

This challenge was further heightened in the 2009/2010 academic session when government removed the study of History from the basic and secondary schools curriculum. Again, some flimsy reasons given for the removal of the subject in the curriculum were that: students were shunning History as there were doubts on the employability skills for history graduates, and that there was dearth of History teachers, amidst other unfounded or real excuses. Expectedly, this official interruption in the study and teaching of History in primary and secondary schools came with some attendant consequences in the country's national psyche. For one, it was most ironic, embarrassing and disturbing for Nigeria's educational history in 2014, when Nigeria marked its first 100 years of its existence as a country, that History was missing as a core subject for students at the basic and secondary school levels (Lawal, 2017; Omolewa, 2016). This prompted some eminent historians and their affiliate historical Associations into drawing the attention of government and the educational system on the need to revisit the relevance of the subject. Clearly then, part of the challenges of studying History in Nigeria was not just in the litany of those aforesaid reasons but in the lack of understanding and "inability of the government to see the link between the teaching/learning of History and national development" (Okediji (2018, p.336)

However, with a complete lifting of the moratorium on the study of History in the basic education by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2022, it is only incumbent that modern methodologies and effective strategies be re-engaged as a way of re-launching the learning and teaching of the subject. Interestingly, part of

the immediate strategies for this re-launching was for the federal government to retrain, in series, a batch of 3,700 History teachers across the country (Suleiman, 2022). Nonetheless, it is yet to be seen, in scheme of this retraining, how the History teacher in Nigeria would be thoroughly trained on how to align traditional or orthodox methodology with the use of digital instruments and aids in teaching the subject.

### **Digitalization in History**

There are various types of digital tools that are functional for teaching of History at all levels of schooling. These include, but not limited to the internet, interactive digital television, web-based instruction, computers and video-conferencing. Studies have shown that electronic resources can be used to play historical speeches in order to secure learners enthusiasm on historical events. Such studies also show that audio-visual resources like films make historical events appear factual to history students or enthusiasts, and thus reduces the abstract nature of History. More importantly, whilst digital technologies aid in the documentations of the past and present, they are equally found to be quite relevant in the forecast of socio-economic and political events ( Mamychev et al, 2022).

Equally, electronic animations, simulations and most recently the prowess of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are all tools that can make the teaching and learning of History very interesting and practical. Moreover, electronic presentations of historical lessons can be smartly used to link text, sound, movies and pictures so as to make such lessons more appealing. Ultimately, it has been discovered and sufficiently demonstrated in the teaching of History, particularly in some developing countries, that the use of digital tools was quite rewarding to both the teachers and students (Boadu, 2014)

On the other hand, contrary to the assertion by Oyewale & OluropoFamugba (2021) that technology can totally replace or displace the conventional pedagogy of History, it can only be very well complementary. This can be done by synchronizing the teacher-centred approach with a student-centred approach while teaching History. The synchronization is easily made possible with the means of interactive, flexible and facilitative technological learning devices. The merit of such synchronized approach is that rather than exposing History classes

to the odd extremities in teacher-centred approach of teaching, a moderation of approach is applied. Digital aids provide this moderation of approach by doing away with some abstractness associated with historical lessons and by generating an audio-visual environment of equal or balanced attention for both the students and teachers in a History classroom.

### **The Past, Present & Future in National Trajectories**

The national trajectories of any nation are inseparable from the dictates of the past, present and future. This is evidently epitomized in the relationship between society and history. Such a relationship is typified not just in a historical movement but in the changes, transformations and patterns that shape developments in a nation or society. Accordingly, Fadeiye (1986, p.82) remarks that: “the society can learn from its successes or failures of the past, and can use the past occurrences to modify its activities of the present and also prepare itself for the tasks ahead”. In effect, the significance of the concepts between what happened (the Past) or is happening (the Present) and/or what is going to happen (the Future) with the Nigerian nation is reflective of Fritz Stern’s treatise on “The Varieties of history: From Valtaire to the Present”, which mostly submits that history is not simply an academic subject, but a human phenomenon whose knowledge should be a common property of humanity, and above all should be beneficial to all the seasons and times of every nation (Fadeiye, 1986).

In Nigeria, the practical uses of history are many and varied. In doing history, the nature and past of a people are clearly documented and explained. History records the age-long behavioural pattern of a people. Where such behaviours are antithetical to the peace and common good of the people, the lessons of history are there to correct such behaviours. History delves into the study of socio-cultural heritage. It records the activities of families, tribal ethos and moral practices that inform the character of a people. In the past, the image of the international image of Nigeria was highly respected around the world. That changed when Nigerians began to engage in a whole lot of despicable behaviours that were hitherto not in their history and character. This propelled the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in 1995 to produce a historical documentary entitled “Not in our Character”. The book version of the



documentary was edited by Col. Lawal Ja'afar Isa, the then Governor of Kaduna State. And so, such historical documentary and book are quite intentional for the search and rediscovery of a desirable national character.

Similarly, every child needs to be prepared for the role of nation building. This role includes loyalty to the state and constituted authorities. No nation survives without the spirit of sacrifice and patriotism of her citizens. The attributes of loyalty, devotedness and patriotism are neither inherent nor genealogical; they are cultivated, imbibed and transmitted from one generation to another. And this is where the lessons of history become indispensable. History teaches the child the arts of citizenship and national epics (Nyewusira, 2010; Omolewa, 2019). Accordingly, Ikime (2008) notes that advance nations of the world ensure that past and present events are taught to the citizens in order to understand and contend with existent problems that could jeopardize the sense of citizenship. Likewise, another practical way to teach and imbibe the spirit of patriotism is via the chronicles of the lives of national heroes and villains, with focal emphasis on the attributes of the former as national exemplary figures whose legacies must be sustained for the continuity and progression of national development (Ojo, 2014).

The current efforts at the evaluation and strengthening of national institutions, whether economic, political, judicial, educational or traditional, largely depend on what happened or is happening and what is anticipated to happen in those institutions. All institutions in Nigeria were established with some sense of clear-cut visions and missions. However, after years of their existence they derailed, and some eventually become moribund. History helps to trace and track what went wrong in national establishments and institutions, and how such establishments can be restored to their original aims and objectives. Failure to do this results in total miscarriage of the activities of such institutions, their misuse or consequent extinction. The Nigerian Judiciary, for example, was one of the best around the world. It was such a strong and effective institution to the extent that Nigerian jurists were exported to other countries. That trajectory and testament of the judiciary is now hardly sustained because members of the bar and bench

appear to be fast losing tract of their integrity and sense of justice. The tragedy in this narrative compelled Udombana (2020, p.28) to write: “it is our knowledge of the judiciary’s past noble role that makes us mourn its present decay... Nigerians must not allow the present, temporary, setbacks to destroy their confidence in the judiciary”.

Again, the use of the lessons of history for the unity and survival of Nigeria is critical. As part of the measures for tackling the problem of disunity in Nigeria, different governments of the country have taken to sundry pro-unity measures such as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, Federal Character principle in public service, establishment of unity schools and other compensatory or affirmative national programmes aimed at addressing ethnic disenchantments and the minority questions. As fantastic and commendable as some of these measures appeared to be, they have not been able to foster lasting unity in the country. In the first place, what the originators of these measures did not ultimately appreciate is that the lessons of history hold the fundamental key to the understanding and fostering of national unity. In fact, Tangban (2014) would argue that since the originators and formulators of these measures were bereft of the knowledge of history, their ideas, when put to test failed to achieve the desired result. The policy thrust for unity-in-diversity is a historical philosophy that must be deliberately taught before aligning it with any national affirmative action, so as to ensure the effectuality of such policy.

Furthermore, the history of Nigeria is replete with prognostic and action-plan programmes. After independence, emerging governments have been in the tradition of rolling out time-bound plans. The Nigerian National Development Plan, 1962-1968, was the first in a series of Plans that followed. The implementation of which was envisioned to bring the country to self-sustained economic growth and economic independence within a period of ten years. It was followed by the Second National Development Plan (1970-1974), the Third (1975-1980) and the Fourth (1981-1985). The civilian government of Olusegun Obasanjo was popularly known for its drive for Vision 20:2020, where it targeted a period of ten years for Nigeria to be one of the ten top economies in the world by the year 2020. President Mohammadu Buhari before his exit from office came up with the Nigeria Agenda 2050 (NA 2050), with the

aim to ensuring that the country attains a Per Capital GDP of \$33,328 per annum, and that she is among the top middle-income economies in the world by 2050.

Similarly, Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals and the current Sustainable Development Goals are some of the global action-plan programmes that Nigeria tapped into for futuristic national development. The question that readily arises is: has Nigeria ever succeeded or maximized the fortunes that come along with any of these past innovative socio-economic agenda? The obvious answer is, No. Every one of the aforementioned plans or programmes either failed or was not fully attained. One reason for this is that those saddled with the responsibility for the actualization of such programmes either did not learn from the mistakes of past or did not work differently from past experiences. Thus, Okotie (2021) asserts that “most government plans, programmes and projects in the past have failed and some are on the verge of failing due to the inability of leaders at the helm of affairs to unlearn and learn from past project failures”.

Finally, considering that Nigeria is not hermetic and that the unity of the global human-race is becoming more essential, the necessity for the use of history to advance healthy international relations is urgent (Adeyinka, Adeyinka, Pully & Abdulrahman (2018). For one, Nigeria is signatory to many international laws, conventions, protocols and treaties. Two, the vagaries of globalization has made the inter-dependence of nations inevitable. In line with these realities, the knowledge of the history of other nations and their respective activities towards the universality of human development is critically germane. It is also in studying the past, present and the inherent potentials in the future of other developed nations of the world that Nigeria can draw practical inferences on how to properly situate the templates of modern development for the nation.

### **Conclusion/ Suggestions**

Events of the past, present and future of any nation are invariably tied to either the trajectories of development or underdevelopment of that nation. Therefore, any attempts at downplaying the importance of these tripartite aspects of time could just be at the very peril of that nation. The setbacks arising from the non-alignment of the study of History and

historical values with Nigeria's development is of serious consequences to the country's future. Nevertheless, with valid revelations on the uses of history, Nigeria is better guided towards realizing a better trajectory for the nation. Therefore, the educational system in particular, and the larger Nigerian society, ought to key into the submissions made herein to avoid a rudderless path in the search for a better Nigeria.

### References

- Abdulrahman-Yusuf, M. (2014). *Nigerian educational history and policy: the beginning of the past, past of the future*. M&J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd.
- Adeyinka, A.A, Adeyinka. A.A, Paulley, F.G & Abdulrahman, Y.M (2018). The Role of Secondary School History In National Development. *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education*. 14(1), pp191-204
- Alagoa, E. J. (1979). *The python's eye: the past in the living present*. An Inaugural Lecture Series No 1. University of Port Harcourt
- Alagoa, E.J. (2009). *The uses of hindsight as foresight: reflections on Niger Delta and Nigerian history*. Onyoma Research Publications.
- Boadu, G. (2014) *An Examination of the use of Technology in the Teaching of History: A Study of Selected Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana*. [www.researchgate.net/publication/268214933](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/268214933)
- Brown, G.N (1970) *Living history: a guide for teachers in Africa*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd
- Carr, E.H. (1984). *What is history?* Penguin Books
- Elewomawu. R.A. (2018) The Bane of Studying History in Nigerian Secondary Schools. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Management Studies*. 4(8) pp22-34.
- Galbraith, V.H. (1990) *Why we study history*. Manson Publishing Company
- Ifemeje, C.C. (1988) *Introduction to history for universities & colleges*. Pacific Publishers
- Ikime, O. (2008) *History, the historian and the nation*, HEBN Publishers, Plc

- Mamychev, A. Y., Kim, A. A., & Miroshnichenko, O. I. (2022). Digitalization of Modern Socio-Economic And Political-Legal Processes: Basic Scenarios And Analytical Tools. In N. G. Bogachenko (Ed.), *AmurCon 2021: International Scientific Conference*, vol 126. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 666-677). European Publisher. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2022.06.74>
- Markus, A.J. & Yohanna, T.C. (2023) The effects of neglect of teaching history in Nigeria primary schools 2010-2016. *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies* (SGOJAHDS), .6(2) p.77– 84
- Nyewusira, B.N. (2010) *A model lesson plan on history*. In H.I. Dike & I.B Aminigo (eds) *Teaching Practice Guide Book*. University of Port Harcourt Printing Press
- Ojo, E.O. (2014) Nigeria, 1914—2014: From creation to cremation? *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*. Vol.23.pp67-91
- Okediji, H.A.A. (2018) Relevance of history in the curriculum of Nigerian education and development. *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education*. 14(1) pp331-340
- Okorosaye-Orubite, A.K. (2017) *Granting this our one request*. University of Port Harcourt. Inaugural Lectures Series.
- Okotie, F. (2021) *Government projects failure in Nigeria*. <https://businessday.ng/columnist>
- Olusanya, G.O and Akindele, R.A (1986) Nigeria's foreign policy in the future: An Introductory overview. *Nigerian Journal of International Affairs*, 12 (1&2) p1-11.
- Omolewa, M. (2019) Education for citizenship and the changing status of history teaching and learning in Nigeria. In R.A.Lawal, S.F.Ogundare, M.B.Bello, J.I. Oladele, I. N. Yusuf, A. Adeleye (Eds) *Education For Good Citizenship: Historical And Contemporary Perspectives. A Festschrift In Honour Of Professor Alice Arinlade Jekayinfa*. History of Education and Social Studies Group.
- Omolewa, M.(2016) The Assault On The Teaching of History In Nigeria Schools. *African Journal of Historical Sciences in Education*. 12(1), pp1-13
- Osokoya, I.O (2007). *Writing and teaching history: a guide to advanced study*. Laurel Educational Publishers.

- Oyewale, G.M & Oluropofamilugba, J. (2021) The use of technology in teaching and learning of history in secondary schools. *American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (AJMRD)* 3(6) Pp 43-48
- Stanford, M (1994) *A companion to the study of history*. Blackwell Publishers
- Stern, F. (1970) *The varieties of history: fromValtaire to the present*. Macmillan
- Suleiman, Q. (2022) *Nigerian govt trains 3,700 teachers ahead of History reintroduction in schools' curriculum*.  
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com>
- Tangban (2014) History and the quest for unity in Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 4(5). Pp 378-381
- Udombana, N.J. (2020). *Restoring Public Confidence in the Nigerian Judiciary*. SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3745022>