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Cultural Conceptualizations in Nigerian Students' Sign-Out Discourses

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ABSTRACT

Across higher institutions of learning in Nigeria the sign-out practice has become an active custom marking students' transition from undergraduate life to the wider world. This emerging youth practice is often characterized by flamboyant displays of fashion, style and affluence and carefully curated social media posts blend the local and the digital in compelling ways. Using Cultural Schema Theory (CST), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Critical/Interpretive Discourse Analysis (DA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) as frameworks for analysis, the present study explores the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the discourses of sign-out as performed in selected Nigerian higher institutions of learning. Data for the study are drawn from on-site observations, photographic documentation of inscriptions, and social media hash tags depicting sign-out events. Following from a triangulated analysis, the study shows recurring cultural schemas such as success as communal triumph, life as struggle, education as divine gift, and graduation as digital transformation which are usually encoded in the expressions of students. Further findings submit that inscriptions such as *Mama I Made It*, *Na God Do Am*, or *B.Sc Loading… Done* reveal the fusion of traditional cultural values, religious worldviews, and digital-era metaphors that the graduating students deploy in narrating their academic journey. The study situates the *sign-out* practice within broader debates on Nigerian languages and expressive practices in the digital era and in addition demonstrates the re-imagination of local linguistic resources and cultural schemas. The paper concludes that the sign-out phenomenon exemplifies the creative adaptability of Nigerian youth in sustaining cultural meaning in a rapidly digitized world.

Keywords: Cultural Conceptualizations; Digital Age; Metaphor; Nigerian Institutions; Schemas Discourse; Sign-Out

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1. Introduction

Within the higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, a practice that occurs on the last day of the graduating students' examinations dubbed sign-out has emerged. This practice involves graduating students parading flamboyant fashion and styles with personalized messages on customized T-shirts while staging various performances (poses, dance steps, money bouquets) that are often documented and disseminated across social media platforms. This new trend among the graduating class has redefined the Higher Institutions rites of passage from a modest farewell gesture to multimodal cultural event that reflects the views of Nigerian youth on success, resilience and social identity.

The Nigerian academic setting which is often characterized by incessant strikes by both the Academic and Non-Academic Staff Unions of Universities in addition to poor infrastructure and economic hardship intensifies the perception of the academic journey as a difficult 'struggle' or a 'battle' that must be survived. Consequently, the successful completion of a degree is framed as an arduous triumph, worthy of public, exaggerated celebration, rather than a mere expectation.

In its literal sense, sign-out means ending one's participation in an activity, system or environment. This can be done physically (leaving a place) or digitally (logging off). Conceptually sign-out may signal transition; from institutional dependence to self directed life, closure; end of study, rite of passage; marking movement from one social status to another in this instance from student to graduate. In many Nigerian universities, sign-outs occur once the last final-year paper of an intending graduate is written. This is irrespective of other courses that might still be written by the same student provided it is not a final year paper. Sign-outs among Nigerian undergraduates appear not to take cognizance of oral examination rather graduating students are seen dressed on white shirts bearing inscriptions, witty slogans or personal mottos, which classmates, friends and family sign on with markers as farewell gestures.

Though rarely treated in formal scholarship, "sign-out" is now a widely visible end-of-study celebration in Nigerian higher education, involving marker-inscribed white T-shirts, choreographed photo shoots, outfits that dramatize achievement, and processions that spill beyond campus gates. Media coverage documents both its spread and institutional push-back. For example, after a notorious photo incident, the University of Ilorin issued an immediate ban on sign-out activities ("making inscriptions on white vests, car awareness and pouring water on each other" *Daily Trust*)[1]. Recent commentary frames the trend as a contested moral/public-order issue across universities and colleges[2, 3], and shows how the practice thrives as a social-media spectacle on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. A typical sign-out in a Nigerian institution is characterized by white T-shirts, group photographs, dancing, public display around the campus and documentation by means of smart phones, hash tags and social media posts.

There is real controversy regarding sign-out culture across Nigerian universities. With respect to characterization, one can pinpoint gorgeous dressing by the undergraduates, inscriptions of goodwill and farewell on the students clothing, photographic captures and other flamboyant displays. However, in the course of the sign-out displays, some obscene scenes have been recorded, and this has raised serious concerns among authorities in various Nigerian higher institutions of learning. For instance, a picture of a male undergraduate from a leading college of education was seen grabbing the two breasts of a female undergraduate during the sign-out ceremony. This escalated concern with the resultant effect being placing a ban on sign-out in the said institution. Other institutions have also followed suit as incidents of unlawful behaviour and public disturbances seemingly pose endangerment to the life of both participating and non participating students. Journalistic accounts, such as a 2021 feature in *21st Century Chronicle*[4], describe sign-out as a national student craze characterized by white T-shirts, colorful inscriptions, and social media diffusion. The article records both enthusiasm (students viewing it as creative expression) and concern (administrators wary of indecent or subversive inscriptions). This dual reception highlights the negotiation between youthful exuberance and institutional regulation.

As institutions place bans and undergraduates cry out on the said bans, there is more to the sign-out event especially regarding the inscriptions and digital expressions hence the need for the present study. It is believed that the sign-out ritual is a site for cultural conceptualization that should be investigated. While the culture of signing-out has become a general phenomenon among the university graduates in Nige-

ria, a Google search indicates a predominant dearth of study relating to cultural conceptualizations relating to sign-out discourses in Nigeria and elsewhere. Such limited scientific investigation highlights a gap in knowledge which necessitates a linguistic exploration of such inscriptions as *Mama I Made It*, *Na God Do Am*, and *B.Sc Loading... Done* as not mere write-ups but embody cultural conceptualizations that Nigerian students draw upon to frame their experiences of education and transition. These inscriptions can be seen as expressions of shared cultural schemas such as *education as a battle*, *success as divine grace*, *graduation as transformation*, and *youth as performers of affluence* to mention but a few[5].

The present study integrates cultural schema theory, conceptual metaphor and discourse analysis to provide a multilayered analysis of the sign-out phenomenon with a view to situating the events within the context of transition rituals that have received scholarly attention. To the best of our knowledge, sign-out although practiced by graduating students appears not to have been treated in formal scholarship. Hence the effort here appears to be a pioneer one. However; we have provided a formal characterization of the event and hope that this will stimulate interest for further studies which will eventually form the basis for comparison. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews literature related to the study while Section 3 explains the materials and methods. In Section 4, the data is presented and analyzed. Section 5 forms the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Discourse is language in use shaped by social, cultural and ideological context. For Henry and Tator[6], discourse is the way in which language is used socially to convey broad historical meaning. It is language identified by the social conditions of its use, by who is using and under what conditions. This definition of discourse is function based. van Dijk opines that discourse studies the form and function of language in conversation beyond its small grammatical pieces such as phonemes and morphemes[7]. In a simple sense, discourse is how people use language to do things such as expressing identity, asserting power, showing belonging or constructing meaning in specific contexts. Discourse includes not only speech and writing but also actions, interactions, beliefs and values[8]. This assertion shows that discourse within the undergraduate sign-out encapsulates the integration of linguistic texts such as inscriptions; visuals such as photographs, emojis, body poses and performative acts such as group dancing and online posting. This assertion further paves the way for examination of cultural conceptualizations in Nigerian students' sign-out discourses with the intention of ascertaining what meaning-making processes are embedded as language in use within the context under examination.

Meaning-making processes within sign-out discourse can be understood through the lens of cognitive linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson's[9] *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* demonstrates how abstract experiences are structured through metaphorical mappings, while scholars like Kövecses[10] and Sharifian[11] extend this to show how cultural conceptualizations shape collective meaning. Nigerian sign-out inscriptions can thus be read as metaphorical enactments of cultural schemas. For example, the common phrase *"life is struggle"* encodes a shared conceptualization where academic success is framed as victory over adversity.

While much of the scholarship on the expressive culture of youths has focused on oral genres, a small but significant body of empirical research focuses on student sign-out practices. These studies provide crucial insights into the cultural and discursive dimensions of T-shirt inscriptions and social media posts and are considered relevant in order to properly situate the present study. Chiluwa and Ajiboye[12] studied T-shirt inscriptions among final-year students in two Nigerian universities using a discourse-pragmatic framework. They found that inscriptions often serve three functions namely self-construction, peer communication, and humor or resistance. Some of their examples include "Thank God, Final Year Done" (religious thanksgiving) and "strike Survivor" (humorous but political). The authors argue that inscriptions are public texts that bridge private achievement and communal recognition, showing how students narrate both struggle and triumph.

Uwen and Ellah[13] examine the linguistic choices in the construction of memory on the T-shirts worn by graduating students in two universities in Cross River State, Nigeria adopting the multimodal discourse analysis and memory theories. The study involved 112 graduating students and findings reveal that the use of inscripted T-shirts among graduating students in Nigerian universities basically re-enact

memories of experiences. The authors categorize these expressions into clusters such as religiosity ("Na God Do Am"), family acknowledgment ("Mama I Made It"), struggle narratives ("Four Years of Wahala"), and digital metaphors ("B.Sc Loading… Done"). Interviews revealed that students consciously craft inscriptions for intended audiences namely parents, peers, or online followers. For example, "Mama I Made It" was chosen to elicit parental pride, while "Error 404: Undergraduate Not Found" targeted peer humor. This study, despite exploring inscriptions, is limited to two higher institutions within the same state. Their study did not account for the cultural schemas inherent in the expressions and in addition the analytical framework did not include cultural schemas and discourse analysis.

Diyaolu and Moyinoluwa[14], investigated customized dress among undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University and findings from their study show that peer groups strongly influence inscription choice, while institutional codes of conduct sometimes limit content. The study reveals cost of customized dress, availability of customized dress, style used on customized dress, and the personality of undergraduates as some of the factors that influence the use of customized dress in the study area. Their study apparently sheds more light on the factors influencing the customized dresses using one university as case study and largely departs from the present study.

A 2025 Legit.ng article profiled a graduate whose "Mama I Made It" shirt honoring his single mother went viral, drawing sympathetic online engagement[15]. Such examples illustrate how inscriptions can exceed campus boundaries to become national stories. Online forums like Nairaland catalogue recurring inscriptions such as "Na God Do Am" and "B.Sc Loading… Done," confirming their widespread resonance without any effort to look beyond the inscriptions for inherent cultural meanings expressed.

Theroux and Furukwa[16] point out different categories of cultural artefacts to include affective artefact which encompasses the sentiments expressed by an institution's architecture and physical settings and behavioural artefacts which comprise traditions and rituals that students participate in as groups for instance induction ceremonies, institutional or campus culture, physical artefacts, symbols, multiple meanings. The sign-out by university graduating students seems to instantiate behavioural artifacts because the students indulge in it. It is done as a group and there are expressions instantiating it. Bergquist[17] discovers collegial, managerial, developmental and advocacy as the four distinct cultures in higher education. Bergquist and Pawlak[18] introduced the virtual and tangible cultures and note that these cultures shape the character of institution as they interact with one another. Furthermore, Mazhour and Hamid's[19] investigation centred on the aesthetic value of cultural heritage in the graduation ceremony fashion of Iraqi university students utilizing descriptive analytic approach. They submit that the displayed fashion emphasizes the Iraqi cultural heritage.

Li, Yan and Liang study the connotation and constructive approaches university culture and note that university culture connotes both spiritual and material achievements shaped by educational practices and social influences[20]. Whereas spiritual culture represents the cores values and guiding philosophies of the university, material culture are manifestations of university culture such as infrastructure and resources that support educational activities. Other types include institutional, environmental and behavior cultures. The authors aver that cultivating a robust culture which reflects contemporary values is essential for universities to thrive in a new era.

These empirical studies so far reviewed portray sign-out as a multifarious communicative act that sustain cultural meaning in a digitized world. Furthermore, the studies situate sign-outs as an instance of behavioral artifact. The present work however fills a lacuna by addressing sign-out as part of behavioral artifact from a multidisciplinary perspective. This is because although sign-out practice is widely experienced in Nigerian universities, it is under-theorized in scholarly literature hence the need to explore the phenomena from the cognitive, cultural and discourse points of view which prior studies have not fully integrated. Furthermore, in a bid to allow for in-depth interpretation of culturally grounded meaning, the present study does not just document usage or frequency but combines textual, visual and digital data (customized T-shirts, hashtags, Instagram posts) in a way that previous studies have not systematically done.

3. Analytical Frameworks

The study draws from Cultural Schema Theory of Sharifian[11], Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and John-

son[9], and Discourse Analysis by Fairclough[21] and Gee[8] as well as Kress and van Leeuwen's[22] MDA as briefly explicated below in the analysis of the data.

3.1. Cultural Conceptualizations and Cultural Schema Theory (CST)

Sharifian posits in his Cultural Schema Theory (CST) that members of a cultural group share abstract knowledge structures, or schemas, which shape their understanding of experience and guide interpretation[11]. These schemas are not only internalized through repeated participation in cultural practices but also linguistically instantiated in discourse. Cultural schemas are dynamic and also evolve as individuals and societies change[11]. Since cultural schemas mediate between personal expression and collective worldview, the data enable us to situate individual experiences within culturally intelligible frames. The schemas encapsulate shared experiences, values, beliefs and practices within a cultural group. With respect to the undergraduates' sign-out ritual, CST allows the interpretation of inscriptions as indices of collective cognitive orientation. Adopting the CST enables us to identify and interpret the dominant cultural schemas portrayed in the students' sign-out discourses.

3.2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) was pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson and further developed by Kövecses with a central claim that metaphor is not merely a rhetorical flourish but a fundamental mechanism of human thought[9, 10]. Through the instrumentality of metaphor, speakers are able to understand and express intangible experiences through embodied imagery. Metaphors map abstract concepts (the Target Domain, e.g., Education) onto more concrete, familiar domains (the Source Domain, e.g., Journey or Battle). The sign-out inscriptions can be read as metaphorical enactments of cultural schemas. For instance, the framing of academic success as "victory over adversity" links the abstract experience of university life to the concrete, embodied experience of LIFE/EDUCATION IS A BATTLE. CMT helps deconstruct expressions like "B.Sc Loading… Done" which uses the EDUCATION IS SOFTWARE UPDATE metaphor to demonstrate how digital literacy has become a pervasive source domain for self-narration among youth. CMT thus reveals how abstract life events are framed through concrete, embodied experiences.

3.3. Critical/Interpretive Discourse Analysis (DA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA)

Following Gee[8] and Fairclough[21], this study adopts a critical, interpretive discourse-analytic orientation, viewing discourse as both a social practice and a site of identity construction. Discourse Analysis and MDA provide the methodological backbone for interpreting how linguistic and semiotic choices create meaning in context. Based on Gee's idea, discourse within the undergraduate sign-out includes linguistic texts (inscriptions), visual texts (photographs, emojis, body poses), and performative acts (group dancing, online posting) thus allowing analysis at the textual, interactional and socio-cultural levels[8]. Whereas the textual level focuses on such linguistic features as code-mixing, syntax, and rhetorical devices, the interactional level analyzes the audience(s) being addressed (parents, peers, God) and the communicative intent. For the socio-cultural level, interpreting how the discourse relates to broader institutional power dynamics and societal values, such as the negotiation between youthful expression and institutional regulation is paramount. Also, Kress and van Leeuwen's MDA serves as framework for visual analysis of our online data[22]. The MDA provides analytical lens into how the entire structure in each of the images works together as resources for meaning-making in the context of spatial, compositional and information values they relay.

3.4. Materials and Methods

The materials for the study were drawn from onsite non-participant observation of sign-out events, online posts on Facebook and TikTok. Data were collected over a four-month period (June–September), coinciding with peak graduation/sign-out activities across Nigerian universities. This timeframe ensured the inclusion of naturally occurring, contemporaneous artefacts rather than retrospective or curated data. In addition, hashtags (#mamaiMadeIt, #NaGodDoAm, #signout, and #graduate vibes) on Instagram and Twitter (now X) also constitute the data. Informal chats with students involved in the sign-out provided deeper insight into the ratio-

nale behind some of the inscriptions, especially those written on their T-shirts by their classmates and friends. Artefacts were drawn from T-shirt inscription and digital captions.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 30 artefacts that are information-rich and relevant to the study's analytical focus. The selection was guided by such criteria as relevance (explicitly related sign-out practices), multimodality (data with both linguistic and visual elements), cultural salience (reflecting identifiable cultural schemas), metaphorical density (incorporating journey, elevation, and technological information), and authenticity (depicting artefacts that are naturally occurring and not experimentally generated).

To enhance the reliability and credibility of the analysis, a multi-coder approach was employed. The two researchers involved in this study coded a subset of the data set using a shared coding framework derived from the study's theoretical constructs. The coding categories include cultural schemas, metaphor types, and multimodal features. Also, triangulation across the data types and reflexivity which involves researchers' positionality in interpreting culturally embedded data provide additional validity measures for analytical rigor. The study draws from Sharifian's Cultural Schema theory[11], Lakoff and Johnson's[9] Conceptual metaphor theory and Fairclough[21] and Gee[8] discourse analysis to analyze the data.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative Overview

Thirty (30) sign-out artefacts formed the corpus for the study. These artefacts which were typically drawn from T-shirt inscriptions and digital captions reveal variation both textually and culturally. From Instagram, eleven (11) items were sourced, with eight (8) items from Twitter, Five (5) artefacts from Facebook, and six (6) artefacts from TikTok represent the distribution patterns. Based on the current trends among Nigerian youth digital practices, where visual and microblogging platforms dominate identity expression[23], artefacts from Instagram and Twitter feature prominently in the distribution. Following the Cultural Schema Theory (CST), six (6) primary cultural schemas were identified as follows: Communal Success with seven (7) artefacts forms 23.3%, Divine Gift with six (6) artefacts yields 20%, Struggle/Survival with six (6) artefacts amounts to 20%, Digital Transformation with 5 artefacts results to 16.7%, Humor/Identity having four (4) artefacts gives 13.3%, while Institutional Critique with two (2) artefacts amounts to 6.7%.

Following the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), frequent conceptual metaphors such as Success as Possession/Trophy, Success as Gift/Blessing, Life as Battle, Education as Journey, Education as Digital Process, and Identity as Brand/Rebirth were identified. Based on a frequency analysis, Communal Success which yields 23.3%, Divine Gift/Blessing and Life as Battle with 20% respectively are found to be the most pervasive metaphors.

4.2. Cultural Schemas Based Analysis (CST)

The interpretation of cultural knowledge and its role in shaping cognition and expression is within the purview of Cultural Schema[11]. The analysis portrays six (6) schemas as encoded in the sign-out discourse of the students. These schemas demonstrate resilience, faith and communalism and thus reveal shared mental models that bridge traditional and modern value systems.

4.2.1. Communal Success Schema

Some inscriptions reveal that success rather than being individualized is seen as a collective endeavor. These inscriptions include "*Mama I Made It*", "*Papa, Na We Graduate*", "*Family Effort, Degree Achieved*", "*Four years, countless struggles, but we made it*", "*#Mama I Made It #signout*", and "*Mama Wey Born Scholar*". These inscriptions foreground extended role that stretches from the graduating students to the family especially the parents in academic achievement thus signaling gratitude and recognition of communal sacrifice. In addition, the artefacts reflect collectivist value systems where success validates parental sacrifice. There is deliberate effort by the students to praise not themselves but their sponsors. Digital posts extend this schema by tagging family members or posting celebratory group photos as represented in the Instagram post below which shows that family comes first.

> *This degree belongs to my family as much as to me.*

While acknowledging the communal success of family,

there is also a reference to coded participants such as "Chief chief" and "Sugar Mommy" as shown in **Figures 1** and **2**. Aside from the textual representations depicted, there are also complementary visual elements projecting communal success schema that are laced with multimodal projection. Textually, both inscriptions foreground gratitude through repetitive syntactic structures ("It's been Xs" and "Thank you Xs"), producing a rhetorical rhythm that emphasizes acknowledgment rather than individual achievement. These linguistic patterns shift agency away from the graduates and redistribute it across social actors. The lexical items *God*, *Jesus*, *Family*, *Chief chief*, and *Sugar mommy* index culturally recognizable categories of support: divine authority, kinship networks, patronage figures, and benefactors. The discourse thus constructs success as collectively produced rather than individually attained. Interdiscursively, the texts blend religious discourse, kinship discourse, and socioeconomic discourse. Religious language invokes spiritual causality, while references to family and sponsors evoke social capital structures. Such blending exemplifies Fairclough's notion that texts are sites where multiple discourses intersect, revealing underlying ideological formations[21]. Here, the ideology foregrounded is communalism: achievement is narrativized as the outcome of relational networks rather than autonomous effort.



Figure 1. Depicting Reference to God, Family and Chief.

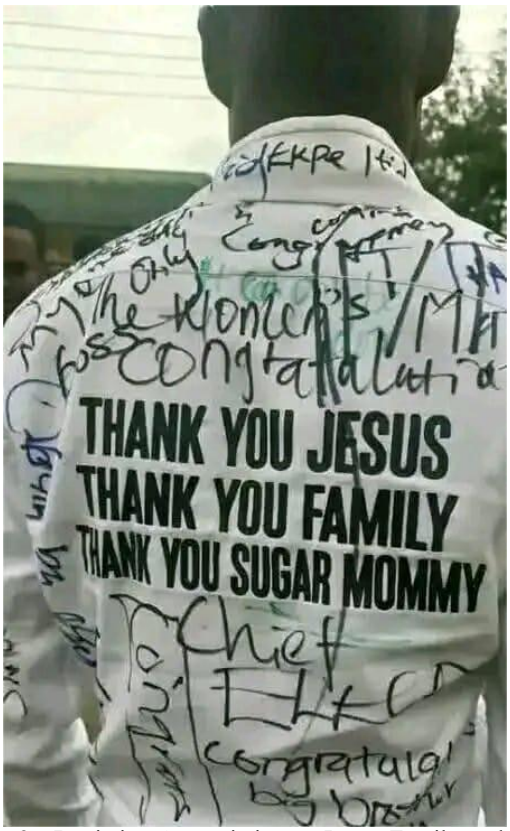


Figure 2. Depicting Appreciation to Jesus, Family and Sugar Mommy.

Discursively, these inscriptions are designed for public display and digital recirculation. The placement of text on the back of clothing indicates anticipation of photographic capture from behind, a common compositional strategy in sign-out documentation. The inscriptions therefore presuppose an audience positioned as observers and interpreters. Meaning emerges not solely from the text itself but from its circulation within peer networks and online platforms where viewers recognize the cultural scripts embedded in the expressions. The humorous inclusion of figures such as *Chief chief* or *Sugar mommy* demonstrates how graduates strategically deploy playful exaggeration to enhance shareability and audience engagement. Humor functions as a discourse strategy that simultaneously entertains and communicates social truths, allowing sensitive themes such as financial sponsorship or patronage to be expressed without social discomfort.

From macro level, the inscriptions reflect a broader sociocultural schema in which success is conceptualized as relationally constituted. In many Nigerian sociocultural contexts, educational attainment is interpreted as the culmination of collective sacrifice involving spiritual, familial, and mate-

rial support systems. The repeated acknowledgment of these agents reinforces communal ideology by publicly affirming that personal milestones are socially produced. Critical discourse analysis interprets such representations as ideological because they normalize specific cultural values that indicate the moral expectation that beneficiaries of support must publicly express gratitude. The inscriptions therefore function as performative acts of social accountability. They reaffirm moral obligations to benefactors while reinforcing collective norms that define achievement as indebtedness rather than autonomy.

Following Gee's perspective[8], **Figures 1** and **2** reflect how identities are enacted through socially recognizable discourse performances. These inscriptions simultaneously construct layered relational, moral, spiritual, and affinity identity positions. From relational lens, the graduates position themselves as beneficiaries of communal support, signaling humility and social embeddedness. There is also a reflection to public gratitude that indexes virtue, respectfulness, and cultural propriety, as well as invocation of divine figure which enacts religiously as a valued personal attribute. As it concerns affinity identity, participation in sign-out inscription culture aligns the graduates with a community that shares conventions of humorous and expressive self-presentation. Importantly, these identities depend on audience recognition. The meaning of *Chief chief* or *Sugar mommy* relies on shared sociocultural knowledge. Identity is therefore co-constructed between performers and viewers, illustrating Gee's claim that discourse is a site where identities are negotiated rather than pre-existing[8].

Although the linguistic content in our **Figures 1** and **2** carries explicit meaning, visual design features structure interpretation. First, is the representational meaning where the participants' body functions as a carrier of symbolic inscription rather than as an acting agent. This creates a conceptual representation in which the graduate is presented as an embodiment of gratitude. Second, the back-facing orientation removes gaze, establishing informational distance between viewer and subject to project the interactive meaning. According to Kress and van Leeuwen in their visual grammar, absence of eye contact positions the viewer as an observer rather than an interlocutor, directing attention to the text as the primary communicative resource[22]. Finally, the compositional elements such as typography, capitalization, and spatial placement determine reading path. Uppercase lettering signals proclamation and emphasis, while stacked textual arrangement guides sequential reading. The shirt surface acts as a framing device that organizes linguistic elements into a coherent visual message. Through these multimodal resources, meaning is distributed across language, body, and spatial arrangement, confirming that communication operates through integrated semiotic systems rather than isolated modes.

Likewise, the humorous tone of both inscriptions is central to their communicative function. References such as *Chief chief* and *Sugar mommy* exaggerate forms of patronage, producing comedic effect while simultaneously acknowledging real social dynamics of sponsorship and support. Humor thus performs ideological work: it permits discussion of socioeconomic dependence while avoiding stigma. In this sense, humor acts as a mediating discourse strategy that enables culturally sensitive topics to be publicly articulated.

It is also pertinent to note that within graduation contexts, sign-out inscriptions operate as ritualized semiotic acts marking transition from studenthood to recognized adulthood. These artefacts document transformation and publicly narrate achievement. The inscriptions, "It's been God, Family And Chief chief" and "THANK YOU JESUS, THANK YOU FAMILY, THANK YOU SUGAR MOMMY", therefore function as commemorative texts that materialize personal narratives in visible form. By wearing these messages, graduates transform their bodies into communicative surfaces that display identity, gratitude, and social belonging simultaneously.

From the foregoing, synthesizing insights from the three theoretical perspectives reveals that these sign-out inscriptions are dense communicative events rather than decorative slogans. Fairclough's framework exposes the ideological structures underlying expressions of gratitude; Gee's approach demonstrates how identities are enacted through publicly recognizable discourse; and Kress and van Leeuwen's model explains how visual composition organizes meaning and viewer interpretation[8, 21, 22]. Together, they show how artefacts in **Figures 1** and **2** instantiate a communal success schema in which achievement is discursively constructed as the outcome of collective effort. The analyzed inscriptions in our **Figures 1** and **2** further illustrate that Nigerian gradu-

ate sign-out visuals function as multimodal declarations of relational identity. They publicly affirm that educational success is spiritually sanctioned, socially supported, and morally accountable. As such, they exemplify discourse operating simultaneously as social practice and identity performance. These artefacts demonstrate that celebratory youth expressions on social media are not trivial or purely humorous but constitute culturally meaningful texts through which broader social values are reproduced, negotiated, and displayed.

4.2.2. Divine Gift Schema

In almost all facets of Nigerian social life, religiosity is displayed. This is also true of the sign-out rituals as depicted by expressions such as *"Na God Do Am"*, *"Grace Took Me Here"*, *"Small Girl, Big God"*, *'We Rise by Grace'* which capture the role of divinity in the academic journey which culminates in success. Some posts made references to the Holy Bible and the Koran, thus highlight religious inclinations. The Divine Gift schema reflects a pervasive cultural conceptualization where education, irrespective of personal effort, is ultimately perceived as divine blessing. Based on this, human effort is captured as only secondary to spiritual intervention. The twitter post below further substantiates this:

> *"Four years no be beans, but His grace carried me. Degree in the bag. #Na God Do Am #Thankful"*

In **Figure 3**, the inscription on the white T-shirt of the student captures God, family and few good friends. Notice the distinct color used for the family. This clearly places value that is considered topmost except for divinity hence God comes first. Within the broader argument of *Cultural Conceptualizations in Nigerian Students' Sign-Out Discourses*, **Figure 3** exemplifies what is theorized here as the Divine Gift Schema, a culturally embedded interpretive model through which Nigerian graduates attribute academic success primarily to divine agency, mediated by communal support. The focal inscription on the white sign-out shirt, "IT BEEN GOD, FAMILY AND FEW GOOD PIPO," operates as a condensed testimonial narrative. Circulating on social media with a humorous caption addressing "Mama" and celebrating the graduate status, the artefact integrates religious gratitude, familial acknowledgment, and peer affirmation into a single multimodal ensemble. Through the combined analytical lenses of Gee's Discourse theory, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, and Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal social semiotics[8, 21, 22], this inscription is interpreted as an embodied articulation of culturally shared understandings of achievement, humility, and transcendence within Nigerian higher education contexts.



Figure 3. Picture depicting shared success and triumph connecting humanity and divinity.

Textually, the inscription's use of Nigerian Pidgin English ("It been," "pipo") signals peer-oriented authenticity rather than institutional formalism. In Gee's terms[8], this linguistic choice enacts a "big-D" Discourse identity, that of the grateful, faith-centered graduate whose success is narratively framed as bestowed rather than solely earned. The ordering of agents, God first, followed by family and "few good people", constructs a hierarchy of causality in which divine agency precedes and legitimizes human support. This ordering is not incidental; it reflects a culturally dominant epistemology in which spiritual causation is foregrounded in milestone events. The graduate's voice thus aligns with a widely recognizable Nigerian socio-religious Discourse that fuses education, morality, and divine providence. Rather than proclaiming individual brilliance, the inscription redistributes credit outward, encoding humility as a valued graduate attribute.

From Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA perspective,

the artefact operates simultaneously at textual, discursive, and social levels [21]. Textually, the declarative structure performs attribution rather than assertion of self-achievement. Discursively, the inscription participates in the genre of sign-out practices, where white shirts function as communal canvases for layered expressions of identity, humor, gratitude, and critique. The addition of the social media caption recontextualizes the campus ritual into a digital familial narrative, amplifying its testimonial character. At the level of social practice, the Divine Gift Schema reveals an ideological orientation that sacralizes educational attainment. Academic completion is conceptualized not merely as the outcome of cognitive labor but as evidence of divine favor and relational solidarity. While such discourse affirms resilience and gratitude, it also normalizes systemic precarity by framing survival through theological interpretation rather than structural critique. In this way, religious attribution operates both as cultural resource and as ideological stabilization.

A multimodal reading deepens this interpretation. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, meaning emerges from the orchestration of semiotic resources such as composition, salience, gaze, and modality [22]. The graduate's white shirt, densely inscribed and visually central, functions as a liminal artefact marking transition from studenthood to graduate identity. The handwritten text, rendered in dark ink against the white background, produces high naturalistic modality, enhancing perceived sincerity and immediacy. The embodied act of another participant writing on the shirt foregrounds collective participation; achievement is visually represented as socially inscribed rather than individually possessed. The graduate's posture, slightly bent forward while others engage with her shirt, reinforces the communal dimension of the ritual. The image operates as what Kress and van Leeuwen term an "offer" representation: viewers are positioned as observers of a testimonial moment rather than direct interlocutors [22]. This framing invites interpretation and communal affirmation rather than confrontation.

When integrated theoretically, these frameworks illuminate how the Divine Gift Schema functions within Nigerian students' sign-out discourses as a culturally coherent model of achievement. Gee's theory clarifies how language choices enact a faith-based graduate identity; Fairclough's CDA reveals how attribution structures distribute agency and naturalize belief systems; Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal grammar demonstrates how visual composition and embodied interaction intensify the message's authenticity and collectivism [8, 21, 22]. Together, they show that graduation in this context is conceptualized not simply as academic completion, but as divinely mediated transition validated by family and community. The white shirt becomes a semiotic altar of testimony; the body becomes a medium of public gratitude; social media circulation transforms personal acknowledgment into collective affirmation.

Thus, within the study's broader argument, this artefact substantiates the claim that Nigerian students' sign-out practices encode culturally specific conceptualizations of success that are simultaneously spiritual, communal, and performative. The Divine Gift Schema does not negate individual effort; rather, it situates effort within a moral-religious cosmology that frames endurance and completion as evidence of grace. In doing so, sign-out discourse emerges as a powerful site where education, faith, identity, and digital visibility converge to produce culturally resonant narratives of achievement.

4.2.3. Struggle/Survival Schema

Some expressions which depict this schema include 'Strike Survivor' and 'ASUU No Win This One' thus foregrounding education as struggle. These texts function as self-assertion and institutional critique and frame graduation as triumph over adversity [12]. The posts below further reveal that the metaphor of life as struggle pervades sign-out inscriptions.

"From JAMB to Final Year: Na Fight!".
"Survivor of Strike, Hunger, and Exams".
"BSc, 4 Years of Wahala".

Beyond revealing education as struggle, these inscriptions demonstrate the deficiencies of Nigerian higher education which includes frequent strikes, economic hardship, and infrastructural deficits [24, 25]. Through this frame, students narrate their academic journey as a battle successfully won hence graduation equals survival.

Beyond the textual representation depicted above, **Figure 4** provides elaborate visual representation of Struggle/Survival Schema. The figure presents the inscriptions from Nigerian university sign-out practices as instantiations of culturally sedimented schemas of struggle, endurance, and moral discipline. The inscriptions "MY PIKIN NO

FIT COME FUTO" and "CAME SINGLE, LEFT SINGLE JUST TO PROOF SAY NA BACHELOC'S DEGREE I DE FIND" situate these artefacts within the broader topic of *Cultural Conceptualizations in Nigerian Students' Sign-Out Discourses*. Drawing on Gee's theory of Discourse, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, and Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal social semiotics, the figures demonstrate how these inscriptions function as condensed cultural models of survival within Nigerian higher education [8, 21, 22]. The institutional reference to FUTO indexes Federal University of Technology Owerri as a locally recognizable site of academic rigor and systemic strain.



Figure 4. Picture depicting shared success and triumph connecting Struggle/Survival Schema.

Across the dataset from which these inscriptions are drawn, struggle-oriented formulations constitute a significant proportion of sign-out texts, indicating that graduation is culturally framed not only as achievement but as survival. In Gee's terms, such texts enact "big-D" Discourses, socially recognizable ways of being a Nigerian graduate, that integrate language, values, emotions, and embodied performance [8]. The utterance "MY PIKIN NO FIT COME FUTO," articulated in Nigerian Pidgin, encodes a culturally intelligible hyperbole: the speaker constructs the university experience as sufficiently arduous to warrant intergenerational withdrawal. The clause "no fit" (cannot) expresses impossibility rather than mere preference, indexing strong epistemic and deontic stance. Within this formulation, higher education is conceptualized as ordeal rather than privilege. Yet, the statement simultaneously presupposes completion; the speaker's authority to prohibit derives from having survived. Thus, the cultural model enacted is paradoxical: the institution is both site of suffering and badge of resilience.

Fairclough's three-dimensional framework also clarifies how this inscription operates at textual, discursive, and social levels. Textually, the use of Nigerian Pidgin English foregrounds local identity and aligns the graduate with peer audiences rather than institutional authority [21]. Discursively, the inscription participates in a sign-out genre that permits exaggeration and humor, thereby softening critique through culturally sanctioned performativity. At the level of social practice, however, the utterance indexes broader structural tensions in Nigerian higher education around extended academic calendars, infrastructural inadequacies, and economic precarity. The hyperbolic vow that one's child "cannot" attend the same institution functions as indirect institutional critique embedded within ritual celebration. Cultural conceptualization here frames education as endurance capital: value accrues not simply from learning, but from having withstood systemic difficulty.

The second inscription, "CAME SINGLE, LEFT SINGLE JUST TO PROOF SAY NA BACHELOR'S DEGREE I DE FIND," extends the struggle schema into the moral domain. The narrative structure ("came… left…") temporally brackets the university journey, transforming it into a disciplined quest. The repetition of "single" foregrounds relational abstention as sacrifice, while the clause "na bachelor's degree I de find" asserts intentionality and focus. Within Gee's framework, this text enacts a Discourse of moral seriousness in which academic pursuit supersedes romantic involvement [8]. The humor embedded in the exaggerated justification mitigates moral rigidity, yet the underlying cultural model remains clear: success requires self-regulation.

Furthermore, Orthographic deviation, most notably in "proof" for "prove", should not be read reductively as deficiency. From a multimodal social semiotic perspective, such non-standard spellings contribute to authenticity and immediacy [22]. The handwritten form, inscribed on a white shirt saturated with peer signatures, produces high modality through its materiality. The body becomes a mobile textual surface, and the shirt operates as a liminal artefact marking transition. Salience is achieved not only through capitalization but through spatial centrality and, in the image examined, through a bold circular outline that frames the focal clause. This compositional strategy amplifies evaluative meaning: the circled text visually anchors the graduate's experiential summary of institutional life.

Importantly, both inscriptions exemplify how sign-out discourse collapses private biography into collective cultural narrative. Through digital circulation on social media, these embodied texts become shareable commentaries on the Nigerian university condition. Fairclough's concept of recontextualization [21] is instructive here: ritualized celebration is appropriated into a semi-public arena of social evaluation. Humor functions as an affective buffer, but it does not neutralize critique. Instead, it enables the articulation of hardship within acceptable youth cultural forms.

Theoretically integrated, the representations in these figures suggest that Nigerian students' sign-out discourses instantiate culturally specific conceptualizations of higher education as trial, sacrifice, and proof. The Struggle/Survival schema is not merely descriptive; it is constitutive of graduate identity. Through discursive enactment [8], ideological negotiation [21], and multimodal orchestration [22], students transform graduation shirts into semiotic archives of endurance. The white garment, as a symbol of transition, becomes overwritten with narratives of having endured institutional intensity. Thus, within Nigerian student culture, graduation signifies not only completion but verified resilience. In sum, these artefacts reveal that cultural conceptualizations embedded in sign-out practices extend beyond celebration into structured narratives of survival and disciplined focus. They encode shared understandings of academic life as arduous yet meaningful, and they position the graduate as one who has navigated, with humor and resolve, the contradictions of higher education in contemporary Nigeria.

4.2.4. Digital Transformation Schema

The digital age has reframed both the conceptualization and celebration of graduation. Phrases such as *"B.Sc Loading… Done,* 'Graduate *2.0 Activated*', *"System Upgrade: Graduate Version 2.0"* and *"Error 404: Undergraduate Not Found"* capture graduation as a completed download or upgrade. These expressions both reveal the intellectual creativity and the ability of Nigerian students to seamlessly integrate digital literacy into expressive practices. They further amplify these online through memes, GIFs, and viral hash tags, creating a hybrid discourse that is both once local and global.

As part of its digital transformation, **Figure 5** shows that contemporary graduate sign-out inscriptions such as *"B.Sc Loading… Done," "Graduate 2.0 Activated," "System Upgrade: Graduate Version 2.0,"* and *"Error 404: Undergraduate Not Found"* constitute multimodal artefacts that reconceptualize academic completion through the semiotic logic of digital culture. Rather than presenting graduation as a purely institutional rite, these texts construct it as a technological transformation, thereby illustrating how visual-verbal ensembles function as designed meaning systems shaped by culturally available semiotic resources [22]. The inscriptions operate as compact multimodal compositions in which typography, metaphor, sequencing, and layout co-produce meaning, revealing how contemporary graduates draw on digital discourse to narrate educational achievement.

From a representational perspective, the phrases function primarily as conceptual representations rather than narrative ones because they depict states of being rather than unfolding actions [22]. The graduate is semiotically configured as a technological entity whose status has shifted from "undergraduate" to "graduate" through processes analogous

to software installation or system upgrading. Expressions such as *Loading… Done* and *Version 2.0* map computational processes onto educational progression, producing a cross-domain metaphor in which intellectual attainment is conceptualized as system enhancement. In this sense, the body wearing the inscription becomes a carrier of symbolic transformation, materializing abstract academic achievement through technological imagery.

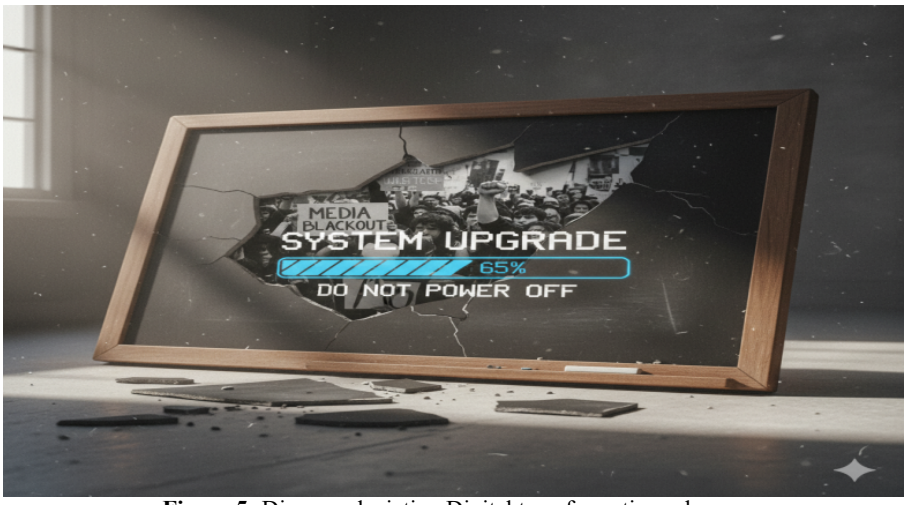


Figure 5. Diagram depicting Digital transformation schema.

At the level of interactive meaning, these inscriptions presuppose a digitally literate interpretive community. Their intelligibility depends on shared familiarity with technological conventions such as error codes, update prompts, and interface language. The phrases, *Error 404* and *DO NOT POWER OFF,* borrowed from web architecture and functions as a gatekeeping semiotic device that positions viewers who recognize its meaning as culturally aligned insiders while implicitly excluding those outside digital discourse communities. Such texts therefore construct social relations through recognition and shared competence, demonstrating how multimodal artefacts organize audiences along lines of technological literacy[22]. Typically photographed and circulated online at medium social distance, the image situates viewers as peers rather than distant observers, reinforcing the communal ethos of graduation performance.

Compositional meaning further reinforces this digital framing. The inscriptions in **Figure 5** employ bold typography, capitalization, and high-contrast color schemes, which heighten salience and foreground linguistic content as the dominant semiotic mode. Centralized placement of text establishes informational priority, while sequential phrasing (e.g., *DO NOT POWER OFF*, *Loading → Done*) visually simulates temporal progression, mimicking the interface logic of installation screens. Such design features illustrate how layout itself functions rhetorically, structuring the viewer's reading path and shaping interpretive emphasis[22]. The visual organization thus reproduces the architecture of digital interfaces, transforming the garment into an analogue simulation of a technological display.

These inscriptions also exemplify semiotic hybridity, blending local cultural practices with globally circulating symbolic systems. Sign-out rituals in Nigerian universities traditionally emphasize playful inscription and performative display, yet the symbolic vocabulary deployed here derives from transnational digital culture. By integrating software terminology and internet humor into sign-out practices, celebratory attire and other hard surfaces, graduates produce texts that are simultaneously locally grounded and globally legible. This hybridity reflects the increasing entanglement of everyday identity performance with digital semiotic repertoires, demonstrating how global technological discourse is localized within culturally specific rites of passage such as sign-out practice.

Identity construction is central to this process. The inscriptions index multiple identity dimensions at once: academic accomplishment, technological competence, generational belonging, and social visibility. The graduate is not only someone who has completed a degree (as depicted in the inscription *SYSTEM UPGRADE*) but also someone who

is fluent in contemporary symbolic systems and capable of creatively manipulating them. Such displays exemplify how multimodal discourse enables individuals to perform layered identities through strategic semiotic designs. In this sense, digital metaphors function as identity resources that allow graduates to align themselves with innovation, progress, and modernity.

At an ideological level, framing graduation as a "SYSTEM UPGRADE" resonates with broader cultural narratives that conceptualize education as self-optimization. The metaphor implicitly casts the individual as an improvable system whose value increases through credential acquisition. This reflects wider socio-economic discourses that equate educational attainment with enhanced productivity, competitiveness, and social capital. Thus, even playful inscriptions participate in circulating dominant ideologies about merit, progress, and personal advancement, illustrating how seemingly humorous texts can reproduce powerful social meanings.

The significance of **Figure 5** expands when they enter digital circulation. Once photographed and shared through social platforms, the inscriptions undergo processes of re-semiotization, whereby meanings shift as texts move across contexts and media [22]. Online reposting, captioning, and hashtagging transform the shirts into memetic units capable of replication and remixing. Through this circulation, individual graduation messages become part of a collective visual discourse that links dispersed participants into a shared symbolic community. The sign-out inscription thus operates not only as a personal statement but also as a node within a wider network of digital cultural production.

In complementarity with our proposed framework, the multimodal inscriptions in **Figure 5** demonstrate that contemporary graduation discourse is increasingly shaped by technological metaphors that reframe educational milestones as digital transformations. By appropriating the semiotic conventions of software systems, graduates reimagine academic achievement as an upgrade of the self, publicly displaying this transformation through visually designed texts. Such artefacts confirm that graduation in the digital era is not merely an institutional transition but a performative communicative act in which identity, culture, and technology converge. Multimodal analysis therefore reveals that these seemingly playful expressions constitute sophisticated semiotic performances that reflect broader shifts in how achievement, personhood, and progress are conceptualized in technologically mediated societies.

4.2.5. Humour and Identity Schema

Nigerian students seamlessly deploy humor to almost all facets of life hence they tend to 'joke' about everything. Though not pervasive the expression 'Brain No Be Beans' obviously deploys humor and slang to articulate self-confidence, self praise and pride [11].

The analyzed artefact in **Figure 6**, drawn from Nigerian university sign-out visual culture, demonstrates how graduation performances operate as multimodal discourse events through which social meanings, cultural ideologies, and identities are simultaneously constructed and circulated. The inscription **"BRIDE PRICE JUST INCREASED"** displayed on the back of the participant's white shirt functions as the primary semiotic resource, transforming the body into a mobile textual surface. At the textual level, the lexical construction blends marital, economic, and evaluative semantic fields. The phrase *bride price* invokes a culturally embedded institution associated with marriage transactions, while *just increased* appropriates market discourse to metaphorically signal upward valuation. This interdiscursive blending illustrates how everyday inscriptions condense multiple social discourses into a single utterance, confirming that texts are sites where different ideological formations intersect [21].



Figure 6. Showing the inscription "Bride Price Just Increased".

Discursively, the artefact reflects awareness of audience and circulation. The message cum inscriptions in **Figure 6** are not spontaneous but strategically crafted for visibility, humor, and recognizability within peer networks. This aligns with the view that discourse production is shaped by institutionalized communicative practices and expectations governing how texts are consumed and interpreted [21]. In this case, Nigerian sign-out culture provides the socio-ritual context within which humorous proclamations on clothing become intelligible as celebratory declarations rather than literal statements.

In addition, **Figure 6** indexes broader cultural ideologies linking education, gender, and social value. The statement implies that academic achievement enhances marital desirability, thereby positioning graduation as a transformative event that elevates social worth. This reflects the ideological embedding of gendered valuation within everyday discourse, where cultural norms become naturalized through repetition in seemingly playful expressions. Critical discourse analysis interprets such texts as sites where power relations and social expectations are reproduced and negotiated rather than merely reflected [21]. The humor embedded in the inscription does not neutralize its ideological content; instead, it enables circulation of culturally sensitive meanings in socially acceptable form.

Viewed through Gee's discourse-as-identity framework, the artefact performs multiple identity enactments simultaneously [8]. First, it constructs an achieved identity by indexing the wearer's transition from student to graduate, a socially recognized status shift. Second, it enacts a gendered identity through explicit reference to bride-price discourse, situating the subject within culturally intelligible femininity scripts. Third, it performs a relational identity, presupposing viewers who share the cultural knowledge necessary to interpret the message. Finally, it signals an affinity identity aligning the wearer with a community of graduates who participate in sign-out inscription culture as a creative and socially valued practice. These layered enactments demonstrate that identity is not an internal attribute, but a publicly negotiated accomplishment achieved through recognizable semiotic performances [8].

Multimodal analysis further reveals how visual design resources structure meaning. The participant is depicted from behind, eliminating gaze and thereby directing viewer attention toward the inscription rather than the individual. According to visual grammar, this configuration establishes an "offer" relation in which the image presents information for contemplation rather than demanding interpersonal engagement [22]. Compositionally, salience is achieved through contrastive color and typography: the red background highlighting the word *JUST* draws immediate attention, while uppercase lettering amplifies assertiveness and proclamation. Central placement of the text assigns it informational primacy, and the white shirt serves as a neutral background that enhances legibility. The body thus functions as a framing device that organizes semiotic meaning spatially, illustrating how visual composition guides interpretive pathways. Also, the shirt operates simultaneously as a mobile textual space serving as a billboard, narrative surface, identity label and performative script. This aligns with multimodal theory that meaning is not confined to language but distributed across material surfaces, bodies, and spatial positioning.

The artefact also exemplifies multimodal interdiscursivity through the integration of several discourse domains: economic discourse (valuation), cultural discourse (marriage customs), educational discourse (graduation ritual), humorous discourse (playful exaggeration), and digital discourse (shareable visual content). This layering demonstrates how contemporary youth communicative practices synthesize traditional cultural symbols with modern media aesthetics. Humor plays a crucial mediating role within this configuration. By framing the message playfully, the wearer negotiates cultural expectations while maintaining social approval, illustrating how humor functions as a pragmatic resource that enables sensitive cultural themes to circulate without confrontation. Humor therefore functions as a discursive strategy for negotiating cultural expectations without overtly endorsing them.

Importantly, the sign-out inscription operates as a ritualized semiotic act marking transition from institutional membership to social adulthood. Within Nigerian university contexts, sign-out performances serve as symbolic rites of passage through which graduates publicly narrate their transformation. The shirt inscription therefore functions not only as decoration but as a performative declaration that materializes identity change. Such artefacts demonstrate that discourse is both constitutive and performative: it does not merely describe social reality but actively participates in

constructing it.

Taken together, the integration of multi-framework shows that Nigerian graduate sign-out visuals are dense multimodal texts in which language, typography, color, body positioning, and sociocultural context converge to produce socially intelligible meanings. Integrating critical discourse analysis, discourse-as-identity theory, and visual grammar reveals that these artefacts operate simultaneously as celebratory expressions, cultural commentaries, and identity performances. They exemplify how discourse functions as a social practice that both reflects and shapes cultural norms, and as a site where individuals actively construct recognizable identities within shared symbolic systems.

4.2.6. Institutional Critique Schema

For the institutional critique schema, the artefacts 'ASUU No Win This One!' introduce institutional resistance discourse which mocks inefficiency and asserts student agency[26].

Figure 7 with the inscription *"TINUBU!!! MY 77K MUST COMPLETE"* functions simultaneously as an artefact of celebratory ritual and as a politically charged multimodal message. Nigerian university graduates commonly personalize white sign-out shirts with inscriptions that blend humor, aspiration, and social commentary. Within this practice, textual and visual elements co-construct socio-political meaning that transcends mere celebration. Thus, drawing on Gee's Discourse theory[8], this artefact indexes a positioned subjectivity: that of a politically engaged, economically conscious graduate. Graduates are socialized into multiple competing discourses, including academic achievement, youth citizenship, and economic precarity. The explicit naming of "TINUBU," referring to Nigeria's President, functions as an invocation of political authority and positions the graduate as an interlocutor in a broader socio-political conversation. The deployment of "77K" presupposes shared socio-economic benefit giving to all serving Corp members depicts a linguistic referent associated with financial support schemes or benefit entitlements. The vernacular phrase "MUST COMPLETE" reflects a locally grounded modality of entitlement and urgency drawn from Nigerian Pidgin English usage patterns. Gee's model suggests that such language choices signal membership in particular discourses and social groups[8], in this case, digitally connected youth navigating economic uncertainty.



Figure 7. Picture depicting shared success and triumph connecting degree with allowance.

Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework facilitates a layered understanding of how the inscription works textually, discursively, and social dimensions of meaning[21]. The artefact's features capitalization, exclamation marks, and syntactic structure that perform distinct semiotic functions. The repeated exclamation marks heighten affective intensity, communicating urgency and emotional investment rather than neutral commentary[21]. The declarative structure *"MY 77K MUST COMPLETE"* foregrounds modality. The use of "must" signals strong deontic modality, projecting a claim of right or entitlement rather than optional desire[27]. The placement of this text on a white shirt and its circulation on digital platforms represent a convergence of multiple discourses: academic ritual, political accountability, youth economic expectation, and social media participatory culture. In sign-out practices, inscriptions traditionally celebrate personal achievement; however, in this context the message is recontextualized as socio-political commentary. The graduate's inscription thus participates in broader discursive practices circulating in Nigerian public spheres, where economic hardship and governance are widely debated topics.

Also, **Figure 7** reflects systemic tensions between in-

stitutional promises and socio-economic realities. Nigerian graduates often confront unemployment or underemployment, leading to contestations of the promise that university completion guarantees economic opportunity. Fairclough's notion of ideology reveals how seemingly individual expressions reproduce and contest power relations embedded in educational and political systems [21]. Here, the inscription works ideologically to critique state structures and performance while claiming recognition of graduates' material conditions.

Also, Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal social semiotics offers tools to analyze how textual and visual resources interact to produce meaning [22]. In multimodal terms, the white shirt operates as a semiotic resource that signifies purity, transition, and liminality in graduation rituals. Its visual simplicity provides contrast for high-salience textual elements. The decision to place the text on the back positions the message for visual consumption by others (photographers, peers, social media audiences), creating an orientational meaning that addresses a broader public rather than an immediate interlocutor. In addition, capitalization and punctuation contribute to visual salience. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, salience structures direct viewer attention and can signal importance or emotional resonance [22]. The stark contrast between bold textual elements and the shirt's plain surface creates a semiotic hierarchy where the written message dominates the visual field. This visual dominance amplifies the message's socio-political implications. Also, the absence of the wearer's face produces what Kress and van Leeuwen call an "offer" image (absence of direct gaze) rather than a "demand" image (presence of gaze) [22]. This positioning invites viewers into interpretive engagement rather than direct interpersonal interaction. The graduate's body thus becomes a site for textual and visual meaning, foregrounding the message over personal identity.

The entanglement of graduation ritual, political address, and social media circulation highlights how educational rites are appropriated for critique of governance and socio-economic policy. When shared online, this artefact participates in participatory culture, enabling collective reinterpretation and remixing, a phenomenon increasingly noted in digital ethnographies of youth political expression [28]. By inscribing political critique onto a sign-out shirt, the graduate transforms a culturally sanctioned rite into a site of institutional interrogation. The artefact demonstrates that seemingly informal personal expressions can operate as strategic communicative acts that challenge political authority while highlighting systemic inequities.

4.3. Metaphorical Patterns under Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Following the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study reveals the framing of abstract events through concrete experience as shown by the following conceptual metaphors. Both the source domain, sample example and the function are shown below (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Metaphors portray abstract experiences as tangible.

Conceptual Metaphor	Source Domain	Example Expression	Function
LIFE/EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY	Movement	"From JAMB to Job Market"	Marks progress, completion
LIFE/EDUCATION IS A BATTLE	Combat	"Strike Survivor", "We Fought and Won"	Projects resilience, moral strength
SUCCESS IS A GIFT	Transfer	"Na God Do Am", "Gifted by Grace"	Attributes agency to divine power
EDUCATION IS SOFTWARE UPDATE	Technology	"B.Sc Loading… Done"	Reflects digital modernity, humour
GRADUATION IS REBIRTH	Biology	"New Version Unlocked", "Born Again Graduate"	Frames transformation, new identity

These metaphors portray abstract experiences as tangible. Whereas the *journey* and *battle* frames indicate perseverance; the *gift* frame infuses spirituality while the *software* and *rebirth* frames dramatize modern self-reinvention. The co-existence of these serve to demonstrate the multiple cognitive ability of Nigerian youth and the nature of their culture

as inherently simultaneously spiritual, communal, and tech-savvy.

4.4. Discourse-Analytic Interpretation

This section of the analysis explores the various levels of the students' sign-out discourse beginning with the textual level. Textually, the items reveal code-mixing in a way that English combines with Nigerian Pidgin and vernacular tokens as shown in such expressions as "Na God Do Am", "We don finish wahala". "Na grace carry me reach here", and "Your boy don graduate". This mixing of code, apart from being in tandem with observable youth culture, makes the inscriptions 'sensible' in a way that fully integrates even the non-graduating peers hence it makes communication all inclusive.

At the level of interaction, the sign-out discourse is seen to have multiple audiences which include God, parents and peers. Whereas expressions like "Papa na we graduate", "Mama I made it" appeal to parents, others such as "All glory to God" address God. Peers are not also left out as the expression "It's been God, family and few friends succinctly captures the students' peers in the address.

At the socio-cultural level, sign-out ritual unfolds within contested institutional space where there have been memos placing bans on the event. Although these ban cut across institutions of higher learning such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, the University of Benin and the University of Port Harcourt to mention but a few, the students proactively migrate the celebration online and thus reassert agency while turning the digital space into a zone of freedom without restriction. Discursively, the moral economy of humility persists as legitimate success is attributed to divinity, humour is deployed to neutralize boasting and critique is hidden in irony and thus sign-out discourse asserts both identity and resistance through its celebration of survival while pointing out obvious systemic dysfunction.

5. Conclusions

As depicted in our discussion of the result, this study explores evolving sign-out phenomenon among Nigerian university students in a bid to interpret the cultural, cognitive, and communicative meanings embedded in its inscriptions and digital expressions. The study based on the Cultural Schema Theory (CST), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), and Discourse Analysis/Multimodal Discourse Analysis demonstrated that what superficially appears as mere youthful exuberance is, in fact, a richly structured social practice through which Nigerian youths articulate identity, belonging, and modernity. Based on the findings from the data, six cultural schemas such as success as communal triumph, life as struggle, education as divine gift, and graduation as digital transformation dominate the students' sign-out discourse. These schemas, apart from revealing a persistent cognitive orientation towards collectivism, perseverance, and religiosity, also emphasize the incorporation of global digital imagery. The data confirm that Nigerian students' expressive behaviors are rooted in communal and spiritual values, even as it adapts to new technological and aesthetic frontiers.

Metaphorically, inscriptions and captions such as *"Na God Do Am"*, *"Strike Survivor"*, and *"B.Sc Loading... Done"* illustrate how intangible experiences of endurance and transition are made understandable through embodied source domains such as journeys, battles, gifts, and software upgrades. At the discursive level, sign-out practices function textually, interactionally and socio-culturally. Textually, there is reliance on code-mixing, and humour while interactionally, there are audiences comprising family, peers, and God, creating a polyphonic narrative of achievement. Socio-culturally, the students' sign-out discourses serve as both celebration and critique thus expressing joy while indirectly commenting on institutional instability.

The present analysis when compared with earlier studies[12, 13] advances scholarship in major ways because it integrates multiple theoretical frameworks to connect cognitive schemas, metaphorical structures, and discursive practices in a way that is quite different from these previous studies. Furthermore, the present study attempts to quantify recurring themes and metaphors across multi-platforms and through these means offer empirical weight to interpretive claims. In addition, effort is made to situate sign-out discourse within the broader dynamics of digital youth culture and institutional negotiation thereby demonstrating that the migration of sign-out events online has transformed it into a site of both cultural continuity and innovation.

Ultimately, the present study through its exploration

of students' sign-out discourses reveals the creative adaptability of Nigerian youth and their ability to sustain indigenous cultural meanings while engaging with global digital repertoires. The study asserts that the expressive culture of Nigerian students will continue to evolve and serve as living records of how a generation narrates resilience, triumph, faith, and transformation in a changing world. From the foregoing, this study has theoretical, methodological and pedagogical implications in its application of multiple frameworks as resources for making meaning, profiling a response to growing calls for theoretically plural approaches in discourse analysis[11, 29]. The study contributes to the ongoing reconfiguration of discourse studies (digital/media discourse, multimodal discourse, etc.), showcasing how cultural cognition, conceptual structuring, and semiotic realization operate as mutually constitutive dimensions of meaning-making.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.N.O.; methodology, A.N.O.; validation, P.O.M.; formal analysis, A.N.O. and P.O.M.; investigation, A.N.O. and P.O.M.; resources, A.N.O.; data curation, A.N.O. and P.O.M.; writing—original draft preparation, A.N.O. and P.O.M.; writing—review and editing, A.N.O. and P.O.M.; visualization, P.O.M.; supervision, A.N.O.; project administration, A.N.O. and P.O.M. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Open AI solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

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