

TRANSCENDING THE METHOD OF “IGBAJI CHALK”

Moving from the Old to the New in the Nigerian Educational System

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Abstract

The concept of ‘igbaji chalk’ (lit. ‘to break the chalk’) which found its way into the Igbo idiomatic archive emerged out of the historical context of Western education that was brought by the missionaries. Like every other idiomatic expression or proverb, it transcends its literal meaning, moving from the images of ‘slate-board’ and ‘chalk’ to the idea of basic education. Yet in its reference to education, it appears to be stuck within a materialistic approach to teaching and learning, and as such requires broader interpretation. This paper argues that the concept remains relevant today and its meaning could be broadened by reference to intentionality in education. Furthermore, it should be made to transcend its materialistic barriers through a mutually enriching relationship with a modern approach to learning that is yet to sufficiently find its way in the educational system of Nigeria.

Keywords: *Education, pedagogy, ‘igbaji chalk’, intentionality, learning, technology.*

1. Introduction

Western education, which was brought by the missionaries to Igboland, was a specific cultural contact that added new words and concepts to the Igbo vocabulary. One of such is the cryptic concept of *Igbaji chalk* which addresses the notion of basic education. This essay investigates the literal meaning of the concept, its broader meaning and how it can remain relevant today within the ambience of modern pedagogy. Hence, it examines (a) the linguistic morphology of the concept of *Igbaji chalk*; (b) the relevance of elementary level of education and the pedagogical potentiality of *Igbaji chalk*; (c) the broad meaning of the concept that goes beyond the traditional idea of elementary or primary education; (d) the

concept of intentionality in modern learning as an element of continuity with traditional pedagogy; (e) the integration of technology in modern learning; and concludes with (f) a re-articulation of the concept of *Igbaji chalk* in the light of the broadened interpretation. For clarity's sake, the primary, basic and elementary forms of education are used almost synonymously in this essay. It is however very important to note that because the methodology of this essay is philosophical-analytic, it suffers the limitations of lack of scientific data collection and analysis.

1.1. What is the Meaning of *Igbaji chalk*?

The concept in itself is derived from two languages, Igbo and English, and has come to assume an acceptable status in the Igbo lexicon. The borrowing of the English term 'chalk,' often rendered in Igbo as '*chọọkụ*' highlights the dynamism of language, which in an endless rhythm of borrowing and sharing improves its vocabulary. In this dynamism, we find a certain breaking of cultural boundaries *via* language. Often people fear that such borrowing and assimilation process of language learning, particularly when not controlled, might threaten the unique features of any language and render it more artificial in its presentation.

Chọọkụ as an anglicized Igbo vocabulary does not in any way imply a lack of Igbo vocabulary for chalk. Actually, chalk is rendered as 'nzu' in Igbo language. In the traditional setting, 'nzu' is used mainly in painting designs on body, especially the face of the priests and priestesses of the local deities. It is also used for ritual purposes. According to Edwin Udoe, 'nzu', otherwise referred to as the 'phallic chalk' depicts "an element that aids concentration and mystical entrance into the spiritual realm. It is used as well for decoration, as medicine, as a symbol of welcome and for religious and ritual purposes."¹ So, 'nzu' just

¹ Edwin Agbakoba Udoe, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts between Christianity and African (Igbo) Traditional Religion through Inculturation* (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2011), 142. For further insights into the spiritual and mystical attributes of nzu, see, Ikenga-Metuh Emefie, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation* (Nigeria: IMICO Books, 1991), 158. Meanwhile, scientific research shows that 'nzu' is a compound of Aluminum silicate hydroxide derived from the kaolin clay group whose probable formula is: $Al_2 Si_2 O_5 OH_4$. Tests reveal that 'nzu' (phallic/calabash chalk) contains lead and arsenic ^{1,3,4,5} which renders it

like 'kola-nut' occupies a prominent position in the Igbo traditional customs and practices.

The anglicized form of chalk only serves the purpose of indicating the emphasis that is intended which the contact with English language alone can sufficiently serve. It was adopted into the corpus of Igbo vocabulary with the introduction of Western education by the missionaries. The elementary education which was the basic² at that time required the possession of a slate board and pieces of chalk as the materials of learning. The pupils were meant to use the white chalk while the teacher alone reserves the right to use both the white and coloured chalks.

The shape of the chalk accounts for the verbiage, 'igbaji', in the concept of *Igbaji chalk*. The slender shape which betrays the fragility of a chalk is at the background of this Igbo term, 'igbaji' (to break). The notion of 'breakability' in this instance does not point to the idea of destruction but to an affirmation of the effect of usage, the consequence of acquaintance and familiarity. 'Igbaji' is an Igbo infinitive verb which is rendered as 'to break' in English. In this instance, it modifies the noun 'chalk' which points to the familiarity that is associated with the slate and the knowledge expressed upon it. Further meanings of the concept will be explored in the course of this article.

However, it must be noted that the elementary character of the concept of *Igbaji chalk* is not merely a result of the humble beginning of Western education in Nigeria with the simple *tools* of slate and chalk.

both potentially curative and potentially poisonous. See, M. Ekong, et al., "Differentia Effects of Calabash Chalk on the Histology of the Liver of Adult Wister Rats." *The Internet Journal of Health* 8, no.2 (2008): <http://ispub.com/IJH/8/2/3484> (accessed June 16, 2018).

² Today, we now have the Crèche/Day-Care, and the Nursery/Kindergarten levels in formal school systems in Nigeria today. Despite the fact that the official 6-3-3-4 system does not recognize this development, one cannot dismiss the fact that these sub-structures of the educational system in Nigeria are now common features. The reasons for this include the increasingly capitalistic nature of the Nigerian economy and the general emancipation of women who have gradually been moving from the bedrooms to the boardrooms.

Rather, it lies in the characteristic formation of Igbo proverbs and idiomatic expressions, which borrows simple concepts and infuses them with intensive meanings. In employing the everyday language of the people, these proverbs and idioms contain deep insights into the religious, social, political and cultural make-up of the Igbo. Nigerian philosopher, Ikechukwu Kanu, drawing from Arinze³ and Anozie⁴, agrees that “proverbs crystallize the accumulated wisdom of a people handed down by the ancients from one generation to another.”⁵ In their apparent simplicity, proverbs “reveal the profound thoughts, and in fact the soul of the people and constitute the true index of what a people hold true. They constitute the form of interpretation of the principles of life and mode of conduct upheld by a people. They are trustworthy witnesses of the social, economic, political, ethical and religious ideals of a people.”⁶

In this dialectical constitution of simplicity and depth, of literal reading and profound meaning, proverbs and idioms become materials for pedagogical purposes in a contemporary setting. Okorie Onwuchekwa observes that Igbo proverbs “are rich in philosophy and the quantum of knowledge gained from these proverbs can serve as a medium for education in this era of globalization.”⁷ The concept of *Igbaji chalk* is more or less a form of modern Igbo idiom. Idiom is understood as a specific chain of words which produce an unanticipated meaning than when interpreted in their individuality or literally. For instance, in English we have such idiomatic expressions like ‘to rain cats and dogs’ ‘to add fuel to fire,’ ‘to flog a dead horse,’ and so on. Though different from proverbs, both share some similarities by the virtue of the fact that

³ Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice in Igbo Traditional Religion* (Onitsha: Golden Jubilee, 2008).

⁴ Anozie O., *The Igbo Culture and Formation of Conscience* (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 1999).

⁵ Ikechukwu A. Kanu, “Igbo Proverbs as Embodiments of Igbo-African Philosophy,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 1 (2014): 164.

⁶ Kanu, “Igbo Proverbs as Embodiments of Igbo-African Philosophy,” 164.

⁷ Okorie Onwuchekwa, “Philosophy in Indigenous Igbo Proverbs: Cross-Cultural Media for Education in the Era of Globalization,” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1A (2013): 220.

they convey meanings that are beyond mere words. This understanding remains our basis for integrating proverbs in this article.

1.2. The Relevance of Basic Education and the Pedagogical Potentiality of *Igbaji chalk*

The pedagogical potentiality of the idiomatic expression *Igbaji chalk* leads us to examine the relevance of basic education. This relevance is not debatable given the impact of education in our modern society. Basic or elementary education serves the fundamental purpose of providing the basics of learning. Every other form of education from the post-elementary onwards is but an elaboration on what has already been sown at the elementary level. In Nigeria, elementary or primary education refers to the foundational education which targets children between the ages of 6 and 12. It is designed to run for six years.⁸ At this stage, the child is provided with all that is necessary for a balanced life in a contemporary society as well as with the necessary knowledge and skills for further learning in the future.

In accordance with the *National Policy on Education* (2004), Adesina Abiodun lists the following as the frontline objectives of primary education in Nigeria:

- (a) The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively;
- (b) The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- (c) Citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- (d) Character and moral training and the development of sound attitudes;
- (e) Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- (f) Giving the child the opportunities for developing manipulative skills that can enable him function effectively in the society within the limit of his capacity;

⁸ Federal Republic of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education* (4th edition) (Abuja: NERDC Press, 2004).

(g) Providing basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.⁹

Thus, the curriculum for elementary or primary education focuses on attaining these set-objectives. However, in response to contemporary issues, there is need for greater clarity of the objectives. Some elements of education that could be derived from the above-mentioned objectives would include the following:

- Introduction to the world of information and communication technologies so as to enhance learning;
- Attending to children with special needs;
- Facilitating transition from the elementary to the post-elementary level of education;
- Promoting equality and fairness of access in education which is at the heart of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program;
- Awareness of pluralism (in a multi-cultural and multi-religious state like Nigeria), a respect for the diversity and necessity of tolerance;
- Establishing patterns and directions to life-long learning;
- Developing a sense of national identity, social co-operation and integration.

As such in designing a curriculum for elementary education in a way that captures the meaning, content and logic of *Igbaji chalk*, the cumulative development of the potential of the child must be borne in mind. Such a program of education should:

- seek the spiritual and moral development of children and inculcate in each learner an ethical consciousness. This would help the learner to develop values upon which to base choices and form attitudes.
- aim at providing learners with the necessary knowledge and skills which would serve them in all stages of life;

⁹ Abiodun E. Adesina, "Perceived Impact of Primary education on the Attainment of Nigeria Vision 20: 2020", in *Proceedings of the 2011 International Conference on Teaching, Learning and Change* (International Association for Teaching and Learning, 2011), 94.

- aim at developing, in the learners, the capacity for flexibility and creativity in both expressions and responses;
- advance the emotional and physical development of the learners.

As the concept of *Igbaji chalk* seeks to encompass the very fundamental level of education, it also embraces the entire content of basic education. Within this content, there is a movement beyond the method, a transcendence from materiality to the ideal aims and objectives of education. Thus, the idiom implies a cumulative representation of the moral, physical, intellectual, relational, and attitudinal contents of education. It goes beyond mere reading and writing to admit technological and communicative skills, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that shape both individuals and society. In a legal sense, *Igbaji chalk* points to a *participation* in the basic human right to education. This basic right is highlighted in the UNDP *Thematic Paper on MDG 2* as follows:

Primary education is a basic human right, both transformative and empowering. Beyond this intrinsic importance, it is also indispensable for the enjoyment of other human rights and is a means for accessing broader social, economic, political and cultural benefits. Education contributes to building more just societies through reducing poverty and inequalities. No country has ever climbed the human development ladder without steady investment in education. Primary education is a powerful driver to the realization of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for sustainable development more broadly.¹⁰

This legal character of primary education makes it necessary that everyone should participate in the act of *Igbaji chalk*. Of course, the responsibility of ensuring this falls on governments. Where the government is not responsible enough, individuals and communities can also contribute in ensuring that everyone enjoys the right to basic education. This access to this right should be made available not only to children, but also to adults who could not access elementary education early in life. Hence, the basic level of adult education falls under our consideration too.

¹⁰ United Nations Development Group, *Thematic Paper on MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education* (Geneva: UNDP, 2010), 6.

2. Beyond the Traditional Method of Education

Transcending the method of the idiom *Igbaji chalk* means taking the concept and practice of basic education beyond the merely material. Here we are not advocating for a discontinuity in meaning but rather for a certain form of elasticity in the very meaning of the term. The fact that the expression has a meaning beyond the words equally shows that it can accommodate an extensive application that goes beyond the pedagogical methods that created its construction at the time. Hence, to transcend materiality does not necessarily imply the rejection of materiality but the expansion of its meaning. *Igbaji chalk* would thus include both the material elements of education and other improved methods of education.

The noun 'chalk' in the idiom proves to be the motivating element in the concept. The idea of 'chalk' immediately points to the 'written word' since it is the elementary object of writing in our context. But then, writing here includes paintings, graphic images and pictures. As such it goes beyond words. Here we find the possible link between the word or drawing on the slate with the chalk and modern learning methods like PowerPoint presentations, Skype interaction and video clips.

Here we see a gradual shift from pure materiality to partial materiality. The idea of partial materiality seems preferable because there is no absolute immateriality in modern instructional techniques. For instance, virtual learning remains impossible without computers, projectors and sound systems which are in themselves materials of learning. So we cannot in that sense talk of absolute immateriality. However, what is facilitated by these technology-driven modern methods of education/learning is the possibility of proxy-learning and advanced self-learning. The effectiveness of these pedagogical methods, both the traditional and digital, is guaranteed by intentionality in education, which is not absent in the concept of *Igbaji chalk*.

2.1. Transposing the Concept of *Igbaji Chalk* to Intentionality in Modern Learning

Intentionality in education is distinguished by its applicability both within the framework of traditional pedagogical methods and that of modern learning. 'Intention' and 'intentional' refers to that purpose for which an agent acts. Intentionality evokes the idea of deliberate,

conscious, planned, directed action. Hence we often hear of 'intentional living', 'intentional programme', 'intentional act', and so on. According to Ann Epstein, being 'intentional' is "to act purposefully, with a goal in mind and a plan for accomplishing it. Intentional acts originate from careful thought and are accompanied by consideration of their potential effects."¹¹ Thus, intentionality considers both the *goal* and the *path* towards attaining the set goal.

Interestingly, this notion of intentionality is not shared by some philosophers (in the tradition of Edmund Husserl and Franz Brentano) who distinguished between intentionality as a "property of human consciousness of being directed toward or being about something" (otherwise referred to as '*aboutness*') and the notion of commonsense which is "associated with the doing of something on purpose ... or according to plan."¹² This no doubt could create a theoretical confusion and so intentionality here should not be understood from such strictly phenomenological point of view.

Suffice it to mention that apart from the philosophical interpretation of intentionality by Husserl and Brentano, the concept has also played a significant role in J. L. Austin's *theory of speech acts*, in John Searle's theory of mind (as well as in his theory of speech acts), in Paul Grice's theory of meaning, and equally in other fields of study.¹³ In all these, intentionality points to purposefulness, directedness, and the correspondence between speech and intention.

Intentionality in basic education implies a purposeful and conscious learning process. It involves the attitude of both the teacher and the learner. On the part of teachers, basic education (as well as education at all levels) ought to be taken as something that is planned, thought-out and purpose-driven. It is not an event of chance. As such, intentional teachers deploy their knowledge, judgment and expertise in the organization of learning experiences. This cumulative approach attends to the instances where unexpected situations emerge, which are

¹¹ Ann S. Epstein, *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning* (Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2007), 4.

¹² Alessandro Duranti, "Intentionality", *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9, nos.1-2 (2000): 134.

¹³ Duranti, "Intentionality," 135.

then converted into useful opportunities for learning.¹⁴ Besides, intentional teachers create mutually inclusive curricula whereby the initiatives of both the instructor and the learners are given a place in the entire learning scheme and channeled towards the same desired goal.

On the other hand, intentionality is equally applicable to learners. In fact it appears to have much consequence on the part of learners because of the wide-spectrum of learning that takes place outside or beyond the confines of the school environment. A Finnish professor of general pedagogy and educational leadership, Michael Uljens, admits that “when we talk about intentional education, it covers learner’s own intentional efforts to reach competence. Thus, self-instruction is included in intentional education.”¹⁵ A Kent University’s translation specialist, Kelly Washbourne, corroborates this by arguing that “intentionality also implies turning one’s gaze on one’s own self as learner.”¹⁶ This means that “the learner is able to keep on task toward the learning goal without receiving systematic help from others; it is a self-directed process.”¹⁷ Intentionality thus facilitates self-directed learning, whereby the learner is capable of disengaging from the teacher in the traditional sense. In further defense of the purposeful, intentional self-directed learning, O’Brien, Millis and Cohen state with clarity:

Purpose implies clear goals, an understanding of process, and appropriate action. Further, purpose implies intention in one’s actions. Becoming such an intentional learner means developing self-awareness about the reason for study, the learning process itself, and how education is used. Intentional learners are integrative thinkers who can see connections in seemingly disparate information and draw on a wide range of knowledge to make decisions.

¹⁴ Epstein, *The Intentional Teacher*, 1.

¹⁵ Michael Uljens, *School Didactics and Learning: A School Didactic Model Framing an Analysis of Pedagogical Implications of Learning Theory* (East Sussex: Psychology Press, 1997), 17.

¹⁶ Kelly Washbourne, “The Self-directed Learner: Intentionality in Translator Training and Education”, *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 22, no. 3 (2014): 376.

¹⁷ Y. Gayol, “Online Learning Research”, in *Handbook of Online Learning* Rudestam eds. K. E. & Schoenholtz-Read J. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 198.

They adapt the skills learned in one situation to problems encountered in another: in a classroom, the workplace, their communities, or their personal lives. As a result, intentional learners succeed even when instability is the only constant.¹⁸

From this, the image of an intentional learner is reflected in a person who, having the goal in mind, is never restricted or limited by any form of instability in the educational system. This 'instability' may come in the form of holidays, absence of instructors, or even the situation of teacher strikes as is often the case in Nigeria and other developing countries. An intentional learner assumes a certain level of creativity which allows him or her to be an integrative thinker, one who learns with a systematic connection of the different materials that are learnt. In synthesizing educational materials, he or she connects them with the world and the goal of the education. So, the intentional learner, by being an integrative thinker lives with the consciousness that what is offered in the classroom has relevance and implication for what he or she learns or observes outside the classroom. In other words, for an intentional learner, the whole world is the classroom and every experience is a learning moment. The concept of *Igbaji chalk* resonates with this idea of intentional/integrative learner because it forms a tool for evaluating someone outside the formal learning space.

Meanwhile, the whole discourse on intentionality in education requires that we distinguish between intentional and unintentional education, or between intentional and functional education. Michael Uljens, provides us with such a distinction. According to him,

While intentional education is always goal-oriented, this is not the case with functional education. This means that while intentional education is conscious, functional education is not. Here one could ask if it is not possible to distinguish between education or teaching that is consciously intentional and teaching that is consciously unintentional. Yes, it is reasonable to make such a distinction, but it should be observed that when teaching is consciously unintentional this in fact reflects nothing but a

¹⁸ J. O'Brien, B. Millis, & M. Cohen, *The Course Syllabus: A Learning-centered Approach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 5.

very specific intention. Consciously intentional refers in this case to the teacher's intention not to put up specific goals to be striven for during the instructional process, thus leaving plenty of room to decide upon the goal during the interactive process.¹⁹

The question arises here whether the teacher is being liberal in his or her intentional approach to education. Such a liberal framework would include, among other things, an integration of the student-initiated content of education. Meanwhile, how can intentionality be measured? Are there parameters for determining when a teacher is unintentional, whether consciously or unconsciously? These questions are necessary so that the general program of an intentional curriculum of a school will not be jeopardized by the unregulated subjectivity of the teacher. Intentionality in such a wider framework requires that the teachers employ their unique experiences, expertise and knowledge in achieving the collective goal of the school. Thus, while there is room for flexibility on the part of teachers, the collective goal must always be pursued.

Intentionality in education is the reason why many schools have developed curricula that aim to achieve specific goals. As already indicated, the task of intentionality is not only the responsibility of teachers or instructors but also that of the learners. The purpose goes beyond inculcating the consciousness of intentionality within the academic environment. It is designed in view of its importance in a life-long process of learning and education. Intentionality is thus future-oriented. This has serious implications for the development of society, the conservation of moral and civil values, and the re-creation of a better world. It bridges the gap between the formally acquired knowledge in the classroom and the daily experiences of life. The integrative aspect of intentional learning exactly does that.

In the context of Nigeria, there is need for an intentional curriculum in the educational system because the values of the society are being challenged not just by the formally educated, but pitifully also within the confines of academic environment. This problem calls for immediate response to prevent any negative consequences on the development of the Nigerian society. In an essay that blamed the developmental decay in Nigeria upon the corrosion of what he calls 'core

¹⁹ Uljens, *School Didactics*, 17.

public values,' Donald Bette Enu, in a re-constructionist approach to educational strategy advocates "the strengthening of *values education* as a possible paradigm for behaviour transformation and ethical reorientation."²⁰ Much as this suggestion is laudable, it however requires a reversal of the curriculum of study to create intentional teachers and learners, who would readily see the disconnection in the present system and critique it sufficiently. Such a generation of integrative thinkers would address the link between the absence of public values and the developmental problems in the Nigerian system and then work towards its repair. One possible way of doing so is to introduce the learning of ethics at the basic level of education. Ethics education becomes then a meeting point for the classroom and experience, materiality and immateriality, all of which could be derived from the concept of *Igbaji chalk*. Meanwhile, if *Igbaji chalk* represents basic education of the old order, there is a need to integrate the new order of education where technology plays a great role.

2.2. 'Igbaji Chalk', Technology and Modern Education

Basic education involves both the dimension of *Igbaji chalk* (basic literacy and numeracy education) and the idea of *iji igwe omenka mmadu mua akwukwo* (basic computer literacy). Whereas the former is ensconced in materiality, the latter is intangibly electronic and thus heavily immaterial. The objective is to show how basic education upholds both methods, and equally to explain how one approach or process informs or improves the other in terms of achieving efficiency and pervasive education in a nation like Nigeria. In what follows, I shall pay due attention to the benefit of technology in modern education, and argue that its application does not necessarily contradict the concept of *Igbaji chalk*. Technology-driven education rather enhances and improves the concept and its meaning.

Today, it is impossible to ignore both the dangers and advantages of technology. Exponential increase in the use of gadgets both in advanced countries and developing nations challenges the divide between the old and the new, the hidden and the public, the Gnostic

²⁰ Donald Bette Enu, "Re-Engineering Values Education in Nigerian Schools as Catalyst for National Development", in *International Education Series* 4, no.1 (2011): 152. Emphasis mine.

form of knowledge and free access for everyone. In the area of education, there is the contest between *controlled public spaces* (referring to classrooms, where the teacher is more or less in control to an appreciable degree) and *uncontrollable private-public spaces* (the world of gadgets and applications which though privately used, has a public virtual environment where anonymity promotes depersonalized interactions and where the content of learning could be fed with absurdities in the absence of any intellectual or moral foundation). Interestingly, the benefits of technology to modern learning is equally caught up in this contrast. Such benefits could be understood within an elastic meaning of the concept of *Igbaji chalk*, whereby the materiality of traditional pedagogy is transcended without being discarded. Understood in this sense, technology facilitates the breaking of the barriers to education that would have prevented certain individuals from accessing education as implied in a pejorative use of *Igbaji chalk*. This is the case as long as *Igbaji chalk* is understood from a purely material point of view.

In modern education, technological method is better captured by the concept of e-learning. Technically, e-learning is defined as “electronically mediated asynchronous and synchronous communication for the purpose of constructing and confirming knowledge.”²¹ It has basically two dimensions, namely online and blended learning. Its technological basis is the Internet and associated communication technologies. According to Randy Garrison, the objective of e-learning “is to create a community of inquiry independent of time and location through the use of information and communications technology.”²² Garrison goes further to describe an educational community of inquiry as “a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding.”²³ This perspective reveals a pedagogical method that appropriates the potentialities of new and emerging technologies to establish “collaborative constructivist learning communities.”²⁴ By this, we notice a shift in pedagogical methods.

²¹ Randy R. Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century: A Framework for Research and Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 2.

²² Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century*.

²³ Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century*.

²⁴ Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century*.

This essay highlights the paradigm shift in pedagogical approach, though without disregarding the importance of basic literacy and numeracy of *Igbaji chalk*. With the shift, education is no longer business as usual despite the lack of readiness in most developing countries. In other words, the standard of education-delivery in the globe today requires the input of technology. It refuses to be stuck within traditional face-to-face pedagogical methods, though without rejecting it completely. This shift which is "reflected in the theory and practice of e-learning is a new era of distance education." From the aspect of online learning it "integrates *independence* (asynchronous online communication) with *interaction* (connectivity) that overcomes time and space constraints in a way that emulates the values of higher education."²⁵

As already indicated, e-learning should not be viewed as displacing the experience of face-to-face education. Rather both should be *blended* together. In this wise, Garrison observes that, "[T]he power of blending online and face-to-face experiences is that it respects the distinct advantages and preferences associated with face-to-face learning communities while recognizing and integrating the enormous strengths of online learning to provide sustained, rigorous discourse."²⁶ This intentional integration of complementary face-to-face and online approaches in order to achieve specific educational goals is what is known as *blended learning*, which is the other aspect of e-learning. Blended learning gives room to the three options of Open Learning, Distance Education and Flexible Learning. Often, these concepts are used interchangeably but there are some subtle differences among them and each one has implications for the use of technology.²⁷

²⁵ Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century*, 3. Italics mine.

²⁶ Garrison, *E-Learning in the 21st Century*.

²⁷ A.W. Bates delineates the distinctiveness of each of these concepts. According to him, *Open Learning* is fundamentally a goal or an educational policy which aims at removing all barriers to learning; like prior qualifications to study, the barriers experienced by students with disabilities, etc. Thus, in this case the blind can come to the level of *Igbaji chalk* by the use of hearing aid. Characteristically, open learning must be scalable and flexible. *Distance Education* on the other hand, is less a philosophy and more a method of education. It affords students the

The advantage of all these is the transcending of space and time, the breaking of all forms of barriers to education. Thematically, a technologically-enhanced learning approach should have the following features²⁸:

- Learning is self-paced and with no predetermined duration for each session (unlike traditional classroom instructional sessions).
- Learning is self-directed, allowing learners to choose content and tools appropriate to their differing interests, needs and skill levels.
- Learning systems require the organization and modularization of knowledge. The individual learner can then sequence knowledge units according to his or her needs (as opposed to pre-set sequences in instructor-led training).
- The materials have been designed with the individual learner in mind.
- Systems accommodate multiple learning styles using a variety of delivery methods designed for different learners, which makes e-learning more effective for certain learners.
- E-learning fosters greater interaction and collaboration (through e.g. discussion forums and chats).
- E-learning fosters greater learner-teacher contact.
- E-learning enhances computer and Internet skills.
- Materials undergo usability studies.

Within the Nigerian context, the application of online and blended learning is far from becoming a common reality. This is as a result of the lack of many necessary prerequisites for the workability of

opportunity to learn in their own time, at the place of their choice and without necessarily having a face-to-face contact with the teacher. The third, *Flexible Learning*, implies the provision of education in a flexible manner and is built around the social, geographical and time constraints of individual learners rather than those of the institution of learning. This includes such educational programmes like weekend, or summer schools, etc. See. A.W. (Tony) Bates, *Technology, E-Learning and Distance Education*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5.

²⁸ Bou i G. Bauzà, Trinidad C. Cascado, & Huguet L. Borén, *E-Learning* (Madrid: Anaya Multimedia, 2004) referenced in Washbourne, "The Self-directed Learner," 382.

such a technologically-driven pedagogy. Many Nigerian researchers in the field of education often identify this challenge.²⁹ Some of the problems and challenges associated with the introduction and integration of e-learning in the Nigerian educational system include the following: energy related problems, like lack of steady supply of electricity, insufficient funds to upgrade and maintain the equipment and the facilities, lack of good policy implementation, lukewarm attitude on the side of staff and students in the e-learning processes, management attitudes, inadequate internet connectivity, low tele-density, digital divide among teachers, limited expertise and low computer literacy, as well as cultural problems. Despite these huge problems, there is need for those in the educational field in Nigeria to keep insisting so that Nigerian learners at all levels would be exposed to all forms of modern technology-driven pedagogy. This would avail everyone the opportunity to access basic education (*Igbaji chalk*) despite all forms of inhibitions.

However, it must be indicated that basic education in the context of modern learning should integrate both the elements of materiality and immateriality. *Igbaji chalk* as an expression of basic literacy must be taken together with computer literacy (*igwe omenka*). Such integration becomes one way by which the concept transcends its materiality. Another means would be by the purposiveness or intentionality that ought to drive basic education.

3. Conclusion: Re-articulating the Idiomatic "Igbaji chalk" in the Light of a Broadened Understanding

Our findings so far suggest a re-reading of the concept of *Igbaji chalk* within the broader framework of modern educational pedagogy.

²⁹ See: Manir Abdullahi Kamba, "Problems, Challenges and Benefits of Implementing E-Learning in Nigerian Universities: An Empirical Study," *iJET* 4, no. 1 (2009): 66-69; Adebayo Florence Aduke, "Usage and Challenges of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Teaching and Learning in Nigerian Universities," *Asia Journal of Information Technology* 7, no. 7 (2008): 290-295; Folorunso O., Ogunseye O.S. and Sharma S.K., "An Exploratory Study of the Critical Factors Affecting the Acceptability of E-Learning in Nigerian Universities," *Information Management and Computer Security Journals* 14, no. 5 (2006): 496-505.

The following represents a re-articulation of the argument in this investigation:

- a) The concept of *Igbaji chalk* essentially refers to the attainment of education. Education here is considered in its most basic, foundational, fundamental, hence elementary, form or level.
- b) The concept of *Igbaji chalk* represents one of the few entries into the dictionary of Igbo idioms following the advent of formal or Western education in Igboland. Thus, it shows how the cultural lexicon and meanings are constantly improved upon by their contact with other languages through historical experiences.
- c) The concept of *Igbaji chalk* while referring to basic education in the form of literacy and numeracy does not contradict a technology-driven pedagogy whereby modern means of learning are integrated in basic education. *Igbaji chalk* thus accommodates the forms of e-learning that break the barriers imposed by time, space, as well as other socio-cultural circumstances. Both methods enrich and improve each other: technological approach cannot function without basic literacy and numeracy, while the latter benefits from the broadness and flexibility of the former.
- d) The concept could also be interpreted as a catalyst to ensuring the accessibility of basic education to all – the old and the young, male and female. Thus, it points to a needed equality of every person with respect to education as a basic human right.
- e) This improved interpretation of the concept further argues for the necessity of integrating technology into the Nigerian educational system. Despite the challenges, even the minimal forms of *blended learning* can be introduced and practiced.

The concept of *Igbaji chalk* as an idiomatic expression is laden with meanings, which hitherto have not been sufficiently explored beyond the popular cultural meaning it has assumed among the Igbos. Its link with Western education guarantees its elasticity based on intentionality in education. Its representation of basic education can further be improved and broadened by integrating it with computer literacy and other modern forms of learning. When used derogatively, *Igbaji chalk* remains, at best, a protest against the inaccessibility of formal education by the less-privileged ones. Understood in this way, the concept represents thus a clarion call for the removal of all barriers to basic education given its interpretation in the light of modern

technology-enhanced education. In the future, I will undertake the scientific dimensions of this research which would involve an empirical study of the degree of the prevalence of traditional methods of teaching, as well as the level of transition from the purely traditional methods to an integration of modern methods in both government and private secondary schools in Nigeria. Certainly, this wide field that is yet to be fully explored, may help to measure (among other things) the performance rate of students in accordance with the learning methods deployed in schools.

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