

SMART EDUCATION FOR CHANGING POSTCOLONIAL COMMUNITIES IN NIGERIA

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We are still seeking ways to prepare all of our students to live in a changing world, an era in which our ideas about what it means to be educated and what we should expect from our graduates and from the institutions that educate them have escalated remarkably. We still talk about curricula and criteria for success but we can easily lose sight of the large goal – to prepare our graduates to be productive and creative people who can work on problems they have not seen, problems that keep changing and do not lend themselves to easy and well-practiced answers. We call that class of problems “wicked” (Riddell and Webber 1973). We and our students must think and act more deeply and more adaptively and build up experience over time in an integrated way if we are to make sense of the world around us (AAC&U 2007; Budwig 2013).

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The term “change” is a constant dynamic, and all communities change in one way or the other. Change could be imposed on people, but a people could also decide to change their visions and ways of perceiving and acting in the world. People could also change by emulating the good they see in others. Indeed, change comes in various and diverse ways, and different communities in Nigeria experience it as such.

Nigeria is a postcolonial society; that is, a society which was once colonised, in this particular instance, by the British. Colonialism and its aftermath, postcolonialism, has continued to change the nature of the Nigerian state and peoples. Indeed, it is known by all of us that the Nigerian State is a creation of Britain. And there is hardly any doubt that Nigeria is part and parcel of the globalising world. Globalisation in itself is

a major contemporary agent of change. This makes the world an interconnected place. Despite this, each nation must take its own destiny into its hands. As Tony Elumelu has it, “The future we all want for ourselves is one of our own making” (4). The major goal of my paper is then to suggest some ways in which Nigeria as a postcolonial society can change on its own terms, and not on terms dictated by the North Atlantic region with its capitalism, imperialism, and globalisation.

There is a need for me to offer a little clarification of the phrase, “on its own terms”, especially as no society in the contemporary world can afford to bask on insularism. Imperialism, globalisation, western forms of education, foreign religions, a foreign language as the official language of our country, Nigeria, foreign technologies in conceptualisation, instrumentation, and practice, etc., all form a spider’s web around us. Unfortunately too, all this forms the template upon which our being is based. Taken together, they form what radical Latin American scholars call the “coloniality of being”. According to Filip Kubiacyk (Gniezno),

Coloniality is a fundamental analytical category employed by intellectuals gathered around the “modernity/coloniality” project, which was born in Latin America in the last decade of the 20th century. According to Annibal Quijano, coloniality may be defined as structures of knowledge, social notions as well as exploitation and domination practices engendered in the course of the conquest and colonisation of the New World, which have persisted uninterruptedly until today, in the refurbished forms of colonialism and

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capitalism. Coloniality, apart from the three levels, i.e. the epistemological (knowledge), ontological (being) and corpocratic or corpopolitical (power) as Grosfoguel calls it, possesses yet another, fourth level, the visual-semantic one. It establishes a theoretical counterpoint for the three previous levels of coloniality. From the perspective of that decolonial quadrivium, the coloniality of perception offers a new domain of analyses of the visual and semantic manipulation within the racial context, which accompanied the development of the modern/colonial capitalism... (8).

The only way I can summarise this here is to state that all around us in Nigeria is coloniality writ large. The broad framework of education upon which we operate is the colonial knowledge system of our colonisers, their corporatism (modes of power and organisation of the political economy), their spatiality fulcrum (their visual lenses, geography, and architecture of the world), and their language (their linguistic mode of expression and communication and its consequent capacity to mediate culture). Within this context, our pretext for being able to determine things on our own terms will be for us to choose what is most beneficial to us, and from our ability to mine our past, and make what we have chosen ours. But this is largely dependent on our being left alone to do that. What if we have oil as we have in Nigeria, and we would not be left alone to manage it? What if the totality of our episteme is derived from them, as it is? What if cognition of even the choice we make or should make is within the template they have offered us, as is the case? What if the measure and yardstick of what we are to choose is their own measure and yardstick, as is the case? And what if the language of our thinking and knowing and choosing is theirs, as is the case? Well, no need to despair. What goes round comes round. After all, Africa exports priests to Europe now.

One other phrase in the Conference theme I would want to briefly address is, “power

and employment”. This is understandable in a situation where unemployment rate is very high. Indeed, Nigeria is witness to an unprecedented high rate of unemployment now, 2016. Going back to our pre-colonial past, why is it that there were no unemployment problems in our so-called “uncivilised” societies? Why is it that the colonial masters who brought us education are also the ones that brought us unemployment? Why is it that what our trained educationists call “informal” or “non-formal” education, which we had before colonialism, did not lead to unemployment? Why is it that a society without schools and teachers and supervisors and ministries dedicated to the pursuit of education had no employment problems? I do not ask these questions in a merely rhetorical manner. I mean them to be taken very seriously. The easy answers to these questions can be found in an understanding of colonialism as a modernising project, a modernisation in the image of the master. However, the master does not have the scale of problems we have in our education sector, the more reason we should address the questions with a passionate commitment. Maybe when the current Minister of Education comes out with his promised new roadmap to education in Nigeria, some of these questions may have been anticipated by him.

After more than a century and half of our encounter with Western education, with the accompanying modernisation project, what do our people understand the term “education” to mean? For the Igbo, do the notions of *iga akwukwo*, or *ije akwukwo*, (going to school), and *igu akwukwo*, (reading book), really capture what education means? Do these translations even capture the nuances embodied in the term ‘education’? How has the concept been domesticated among the Igbo? I pose this question because what education means for the Igbo is usually that of *ije akwukwo ka enweta oru oyibo* (going to school in order to secure

white-collar/ western/modern job). I believe that this understanding applies to other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The disappointment that follows this understanding as indicated by joblessness after school at all levels is an outcome of this very understanding of education as mere preparatory for employment by Government or the private sector. As it is, and luckily too, many of Nigeria's current generation of the young have realised the futility of understanding education in that sense. Some are increasingly desiring to leave university education because they are of the opinion that this system of education does not meet with their aspirations. Indeed, there are instances of those who have deliberately quit schooling in order to explore the world of ICT, entertainment, modelling, and other entrepreneurial jobs where they can be on their own, degree or no degree.

Going further, it may be asked: How do the Igbo describe an educated person beyond saying: *o mara akwukwo* (he or she knows book)? I do believe that this would also largely be the case with other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This understanding at best signifies that an educated person is intelligent or brilliant. Does it describe any skills the person has acquired? Even if this meant that an educated person is intelligent or brilliant in his or her area of specialisation, does this also denote or even connote the possession of relevant job skills by the individual? I strongly believe that this is the understanding that members of other ethnic groups in Nigeria have about what constitutes an educated person. Luckily, it does appear to me that this Conference squarely confronts some of the problems that have been raised here. The thematic focus on "Education, Power and Employment for Changing Communities" already sheds light on what is missing in the current education system.

Education, power, and employment as used in this conference theme would seem to me to generate what Judith Ramaley, the writer whose quotation forms the preface and template of my paper, calls "big wicked questions" (24).

The concern raised in her paper demonstrates how modernisation and globalisation have made many problems universal throughout the world. Indeed, for me, her first sentence, "We are still seeking ways to prepare all of our students to live in a changing world, an era in which our ideas about what it means to be educated and what we should expect from our graduates and from institutions that educate them have changed remarkably", captures in a very succinct way what I perceive to be the critical concerns of the organisers of this Conference. I am particularly interested in the clause, "to prepare *all* (my emphasis) of our students to live in a changing world", even though some communities in Nigeria change a hundred times faster than some other communities.

Let me immediately cite another source that seems to provide the answers to the challenges presented by Judith Ramaley. A National Panel Report on *Great Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to School*, underlies the need for a reform in educational practices which projects "a clear focus on the kinds of learning students need for a complex world" (x), and "urges an invigorated and practical liberal education as the most empowering forms of learning for the twenty-first century" (x – xi). Such a policy must lead a learner to become empowered, informed, and responsible. For the Panel, "the empowered is one who learns to

- * effectively communicate orally, visually, in writing, and in a second language
- * understand and employ quantitative and qualitative analysis to solve problems
- * interpret and evaluate information from a variety of information from a variety of sources
- * understand and work within complex systems and with diverse groups
- * demonstrate intellectual agility and the ability to manage change

* transform information into knowledge and knowledge into judgement and action.

Going further, the Panel recommends that for students to be informed, they must learn about:

- * the human imagination, expression, and the products of many cultures
- * the interrelations within and among global and cross-cultural communities
- * means of modelling the natural, social, and technical worlds
- * the values and histories underlying U.S democracy.

Finally, the Panel is of the view that a responsible learner should have received such education that can foster:

- * intellectual honesty
- * responsibility for society's moral health and for social justice
- * active participation as a citizen of a diverse democracy
- * discernment of the ethical consequences of decisions and actions
- * deep understanding of one's self and respect for the complex identities of others, their histories, and their cultures (xi – xii).

On its own, LEAP, Liberal Education & America's Promise, recommends similar things as the "essential learning outcomes" endorsed by the organisation. These are:

Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World

Through study in the sciences and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts

Focussed by engagement with big questions, both contemporary and enduring

Intellectual and Practical Skills, including

- *Inquiry and analysis
- *Critical and creative thinking

*Written and oral communication

*Quantitative literacy

*Information literacy

*Teamwork and problem solving

Practiced extensively, across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards of performance

Personal and Social Responsibility, including

*Civic knowledge and engagement – local and global

*Intercultural knowledge and competence

*ethical reasoning and action

*Foundation and skills for lifelong learning

Anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges

Integrative and Applied learning, including

*Synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies

Demonstrated through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems

In a footnote to these listings, LEAP observes that the organisation arrived at these recommendations through "a multilayer dialogue with hundreds of colleges and universities about needed goals for student learning; analysis of a long series of recommendations and reports from the business communities; and analysis of the accreditation requirement for engineering, business, nursing, and teacher education".

The recommendations made in these two documents are for the United States of America, but most of them are very much applicable to the Nigerian situation, excepting the one about "understanding the values and the histories underlying U.S. democracy"; in which case, one could substitute Nigeria for U.S, for it to apply to the Nigerian society. A cursory review of the literature on empowerment

education by whatever name called suggests that “smart education” and “futures education” could achieve the desired goals.

When I chose the title of my paper, I thought that I was being innovative by extending Hillary Clinton’s notion of “smart power” to the educational system. The rationale for her use of the term “smart power” arose from the necessity, during her tenure as Secretary of State, to, in her own words, “update our thinking to match the changes we were seeing all around us” (33). After a critical analysis of the foreign policy in America, she says:

This analysis led me to embrace a concept known as smart power. Which had been kicking around Washington for a few years. Harvard’s Joseph Nye, Suzanne Nossel of Human Rights Watch, and a few others had used the term, although we all had slightly different meanings. For me, smart power meant choosing the right combination of tools – diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural – for each situation (33).

As it is, the smart power principle is the art of judicious selection of instruments of problem-solving from all and any available pool of tools. When I decided to use this phenomenon and extend it to education, little did I know that the notion of “smart education” had been in use, probably dating from the time smart phones were developed. A Korean White paper on “smart education” defines it thus:

SMART EDUCATION is an education system designed to strengthen the capabilities of 21st century’s learners by offering an intelligent and customized learning solution. SMART aims for a driving force that will innovate the educational system including education environment, method and evaluation. As the initials of SMART indicate, it is self-directed (learning attitude), motivated (interest), adaptive (aptitude and ability), resource enriched (plenty of learning materials) and technology embedded (ICT utilization) (2).

In other words, SMART EDUCATION requires that individuals in the 21st century should be educated in ways that they would have the ability and capability to confront and overcome 21st century challenges. The Ohio Department of Education goes further to demand that education in the 21st century would need to have what it calls “smart goals” which should be, Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented /Relevant, and time-bound (4). Borrowing heavily from the model of an electric grid, the American Association for the Advancement of Science develops the notion of an institutional Smart grid in the following manner:

Correspondingly, the current system of education is struggling to respond properly to the array of challenges presented in an increasingly diverse group of students. Institutions have to innovate and adapt to produce better outcomes for students as well as ensure their own institutional livelihood and the country’s well-being. Thus, the institutional Smart Grid connects existing institutional resources through individualized collaborative agreement to build America’s science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce and academic programs. In the metaphor, the “energy” consists of STEM opportunities and contributions by STEM graduates to U.S. and global innovation, economic growth, and national security. Institutions of higher education are the “generators” and “distributors” that ensure that the STEM energy flows to the right “users” – students of all backgrounds as well as U.S. economic and industrial actors. Collaborative agreements helps institutions increase accessibility and adapt the delivery of their STEM to a larger and broader pool of students (5).

Again, these delineations refer to the American situation, but they are adaptable to the Nigeria situation. The exposition in the

quotation is enough to demonstrate that the notion of smart education has been around for some time now. This notwithstanding, I did not want to do away with the notion of “smart education”. However, some countries have moved beyond “smart education” to “smart schools”, and they have re-defined SMART to mean: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. The New York Smart School Bond canvasses that money raised from communities and government through a partnership agreement should be used to do the following:

- * Acquire learning technology equipment or facilities, including but not limited to interactive whiteboards, computer servers, and desktop, laptop and tablet computers;

- * Install high-speed or wireless internet connectivity for schools and communities;

- * Construct, enhance, and modernize educational facilities to accommodate pre-kindergarten programs and to provide instructional space to replace classroom trailers; and

- * Install high-tech features in school buildings and on school campuses, including but not limited to video surveillance, emergency notification systems, and physical access controls (Smart Schools Q and A, 2). Web.

This is real futuristic education. Nigeria has not yet attained this level, but it can be argued that if the last measure suggested here were in place in schools where the Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram members, the ugly incident would not have taken place.

Smart education, smart schools, all well and good, but that is not really the notion of ‘smart’ I had in mind when I chose my topic. And to that I go now. I have decided to go back to Igbo folklore to adopt the original notion of smartness, a notion which I believe is smarter than these new foreign smart things. As in all things Igbo, no tale is complete without mention of the tortoise. So, here, I lean on literature, my

area of specialisation. It is retold that a long time ago, Tortoise called his three children, and asked them the number of times things could happen to them before they learn their lesson. The first child said that if something happened to him two times, he would learn before a third occurrence. The second said that if something happened to him once, he would learn his lesson. The third said that he would not want anything to happen to him before he learns his lesson. Tortoise is said to have smiled broadly, and then said to the third child: “You are my son.” This is a classic illustration of smartness: the readiness and positioning of oneself in such a way that all untoward circumstances could be avoided. This is the notion of smart education that I want to pursue in this paper. For one thing, it captures what is focalised in the tale; that is, the ability to forecast and solve problems before they manifest. The issue of responsibility, a feature generally lacked by Tortoise, is another matter altogether, a way in which a learner decides to deploy what he or she has learnt.

Smartness, the type that Tortoise wants to implant in his children, is a very clear one, not minding that it does not teach the other un-smart children of his how to become smart. It is something that one of his children may have inherited. My concern in using it is not on whether it is inherited or acquired, or on whether it is privileged, and therefore hierarchy-creating or not, but on its analogical adequacy as something a student must strive to be in twenty-first century Nigeria. I doubt that there is any person who would not want to know how to avert any form of calamity, known before hand or not known at all. It is a mental disposition that helps one to avoid being caught up with what is captured in the Igbo proverb: *agwo fere, e tie okpiri*; i.e., hitting a snake after it has passed. Smart education in this sense means knowing when a snake is about attacking one, and hitting it at that point,

and thereby avoid hitting the ground when the snake has struck and glided away to safety. But it is also a situation that equips one with the power of averting any snake attack. And it is also an attempt to avert a situation captured in another Igbo proverb: *ife ka nte bakwuru nte n'onu*; i.e., the thing greater than the mouse entered its hole. All these three illustrations from Igbo folklore could be collectively called "proactive action". In other words, smart education in this context means proactive education, a proactive action by all actors and sectors of the education industry.

Tortoise, as has already been observed, does not teach his children how to be smart. So, how can smart education be achieved? How can empowered, informed, and responsible learning be achieved? With particular reference to the notions of power and employment evoked in the theme of this Conference, I need to point out that the notion of power as control and influence is problematic in the sense that it makes it intrinsically relational; i.e., that of A having and exercising power over B. The greatest power which education, in whatever way defined, confers on people is that it enables the individual to develop a good sense of survival in the world. This good sense is a function of the knowledge repertoire of an individual. H. C. Mruthyunjaya has argued that:

It is a universally accepted truth and a well-recognized fact that Knowledge is the supreme power on earth and acts as a very useful and an indispensable tool in the hands of mankind, whether it is for personal life, professional life, social life or corporate life. Knowledge plays a key role in shaping all facets of life. A judicious and a diligent application of knowledge is all that is needed for this purpose ... in a true sense, the word knowledge means being aware of or knowing about certain things, facts, subjects, etc. It is in this sense that the word knowledgeable refers to a person who is well-informed. The word knowledge is also referred to mean

competence and expertise though their personified derivatives, expert and competent convey much more meaning than a mere well-informed person (37).

A well-informed person who has patiently and rationally evaluated all information before him or her can certainly be described as a person possessing of good sense. Good sense is not easy to come by.

Osmond Ozota, a man from my village, Umuoda, Lejja, Nsukka local government area of Enugu State, Nigeria, is credited with this proverb that "passing six is not passing sense". Fundamentally, this translates to the fact that success in educational endeavours does not mean the possession of good sense. Yet, it cannot be denied that education is one of the surest ways to becoming well-informed. The problem is that not all education makes its recipients well-informed. I think that it must also be stated that being well-informed is relative to time and context. A corollary of this is that part of a person's being well-informed is the person's potential to get further adequate information as the need arises. All this must then add up to what is meant here by having good sense. The possession of good sense by an individual presupposes that the person must be well adjusted to the ways of the world. It presupposes that the person knows how to navigate his or her way through the tortuous paths of life. In other words, the possession of good sense enables an individual to manage success and cope with difficulties, including unemployment. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe evokes the Igbo proverb about *eneke nti oba*, the bird, reported to have said that since men learnt the art of shooting without missing, it learnt to fly without perching.

Having good sense is not only about successfully navigating tortuous paths; it is also about striking a balance in one's ethical disposition to life, especially in times of stress

and immense hardship. An individual who embarks on stealing or armed robbery because of lack of employment definitely lacks good sense. A person who involves himself or herself in an examination malpractice because he or she had bad teachers, or because he or she had no money to buy relevant books for the examination, lacks good sense. A young unemployed graduate who continues to apply for jobs for many years without success, and who makes no attempt at doing any other thing for a living lacks good sense. As it is, it seems plausible to suggest that lack of good sense is no respecter of education, person, or status.

How does one develop good sense? In what worldview is this good sense developed? For the Igbo, the world is predominantly seen as a market place; *uwa bu ashua / afia*, as the Igbo proverb has it. Educationists have identified several qualities that largely suggest the educational content that could make people develop good sense. A market thrives the more people patronise it. This is very well represented in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. How do we marry Malthus, Darwin, and the Igbo perception of the market as better when it is bigger? How does this agree with the modern pessimism about population growth in the world? It is strange that what Thomas Malthus wrote about agricultural societies in terms of population overtaking food production did not elicit the same reaction from a traditional Igbo society whose economy was also agro-based. Indeed, the solution proffered by Malthus is caricatured in an Igbo folktale in which because of acute famine in the land of animals, they, the animals decided that the best option was for them to kill off their mothers. Only the wise dog disobeys this order, showing how smart he was. It is important to add here that one of the significant pointers to a changing community is its population dynamics.

Darwin is of interest because his reflections on the origin of species and the process of natural selection provide us with

thematic templates relevant for this discussion. Issues such as struggle for survival in very high competitive contexts, adaptation in the face of change and variability, development, randomness, etc., all resonate with our discussion. We live in a capitalist economy, and the struggle for survival is intense; there is great competitiveness amongst social and economic actors. In this struggle, many will survive, but others will fall by the wayside. It is in recognition of this that the Igbo have a proverb: *Ogo nya gbaa oso, nya agbaa oso, ha da mbuba, nya yara ha*; meaning: if my age-mates embark on a race, I join them, but if they fall by the wayside, I leave them behind and continue the race. This is in line with the Igbo perception of the world as a market place, a place in which one goes home with whatever purchase the person makes. The guiding rule however is that of mutuality and reciprocity: *eme onye ka emere ibe*; treating all equally in spite of the maxim: *manya fu onye o mara o bua ufufu*; when palm wine sees a person it knows, its foaming reduces, thereby introducing humanness in market transactions. Yes, there must be struggle for existence; some will succeed, and some will fail; the wired gene in people and the environment they operate in will definitely produce different results. It is for this reason that the Igbo place so much emphasis on background checks on where their children marry into. Yes, the environment is there, but genetic endowment can overcome the phenomenological and phenotypical challenges that confront people in their quest for survival. It is no wonder that Tortoise tests his children to know who has inherited his smartness. It is not a DNA test for paternity verification. This notion of smartness makes for personal empowerment, and for the possession of good sense.

The second area in which contemporary education in Nigeria is un-smart is the increasingly level of unemployment

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created by overproduction of skewed manpower, such that there are areas of unfilled manpower needs and areas where the manpower available may be said to quadruple available jobs. Both factors suggest that the curricula of the educational institutions are outdated, at least as recently affirmed by Professor Suleiman Elias Bogoro, the Executive Secretary TETFund in a Convocation Lecture he presented at the Kaduna State University on December 11, 2015. In this lecture, the speaker identifies six types of unemployment, to wit: structural, frictional, seasonal, cyclical, residual, and technological (4 – 5). Of these, structural, frictional, and technological unemployment could be said to be acute in Nigeria. Nigeria's educational system should immediately diversify towards entrepreneurial studies and skills acquisition such that individuals on completion of a programme of course of study should be able to become their own employers. In addition to this, the Nigerian government should establish an Education and Technology Bank whose sole role will be to provide start-up low interest loan to graduates who are both skilled and have the entrepreneurial competence to start their own businesses. Indeed, such a Bank would complement and even help to strengthen the effective and successful TETFUND. Nigeria needs this type smart policy.

By way of conclusion, let me remind us that innumerable measures, including periodic review of curricula of schools, colleges, polytechnics, and universities, have been taken in the past in Nigeria to develop a responsive educational system, but the problem of unemployment is increasing, rather than educing. The National Universities Commission introduced Entrepreneurship studies as mandatory course in Nigerian universities, but the manner in which the course is organised as a General Studies course in some universities does not offer much promise for alleviating unemployment problems in Nigeria. A British

Council sponsored research on the job crisis in Africa has it that:

To date, the responses to the employability challenge in the four Sub-Saharan African countries have centred around updating of curricula and orienting course content towards employer needs, expansion of work placement programmes, and introduction of entrepreneurship courses. Nigeria, for example, has made entrepreneurship education compulsory in all federal institutions. The impact of these measures, however, is not yet known (8).

But in one way or the other, the development of entrepreneurial education and skills, whether in universities, polytechnics, or colleges of education, would appear to hold the major key to solving many aspects of unemployment produced by the type of tertiary, secondary, and primary education that we have in Nigeria at the present time. The next move should be for governments at all levels in Nigeria to establish and adequately fund and monitor schools of entrepreneurial studies and acquisition of skills centres. Thereafter, governments should explore avenues, by way of commissions and committees, of integrating these centres and the existing conventional schools with the Smart education of the Tortoisean model as described in this paper. Finally, Nigeria should apply a phenomenon called "smart specialisation" defined as, "a strategic approach to economic development through targeted support to Research and Innovation (R&I). More generally, smart specialisation involves process of developing a vision, identifying competitive advantage, setting strategic priorities and making use of smart policies to maximise the knowledge-based development potential of any region, strong or weak, high-tec or low-tec" (JRS 2012) (9). Whatever be the case, whichever curricula may be innovated and adopted, whatever measurement indices and methodological perspectives, whatever guidance and counselling units, and whatever smart policies, I want to end my paper by

stating that it will no longer be our portion that *ife ka nte ga abakwutakwa nte n'onu*; i.e., that what is greater than the mouse has entered the hole of the mouse. Futuristic planning for futuristic education is the solution to this. And that is the real smart education. Thanks for listening.

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