

## **Formal Music Education in Contemporary Nigeria: Current State, Challenges and Strategies for Sustainable Development**

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### **Abstract**

Formal music education in Nigeria is a legacy of colonial and missionary activities. Before formal and institutionalised music education, aspects of semi-formal music pedagogy existed through private lessons on using musical instruments in marching bands, schools, and church choirs. Nigerian music education scholars have constantly focused on formal music education to appraise its direction. The aim is also to highlight its form and development at different points. In what stands as a developmental process, music education was decentralised to the various tiers of education: tertiary, secondary and primary. Available indicators reveal challenges such as curriculum content learning, professional capacity of teachers and graduates, societal support and funding, among others. Tackling these problems requires appropriate strategies. This article discusses the current state of music education and its challenges in contemporary Nigeria. Strategies for its sustainable development are presented. The study adopted historical, descriptive, and analytical methods. The study argues for cultivating Africa-sensed music education underpinned by learners' cultural background.

**Keywords:** Formal Music, Education, Contemporary Nigeria, Challenges, Strategies, Sustainable Development

### **Introduction**

Formal music education in Nigeria was cultivated, developed and formalised on the backdrop of semi-formal musical activities accompanying colonial and missionary activities in Nigeria, as in other parts of Africa (Herbst, Rudolph, Onyeji, 2003; Vidal, 2012; Onyeji 2016). Flolu and Amuah (2003, pp.1) submit that “few scholars, writing on any subject of interest about sub-Saharan African (sic) will omit to wrestle – no matter how briefly- with colonialism, Christianity and cultural emancipation.” In what could be described as a show of enthusiasm, reception, and willingness to expand their musical horizons, many Nigerian natives accepted the new forms of musical expression through marching bands, choral music in school and church choirs and individual private lessons on the use of musical instruments. This solid disposition for the new forms of music is firmly linked to the high-level religious and musical rooting of Nigerians, who have already participated in similar indigenous activities in their various local communities. Adegbite 2001; Idolor 2001 and Vidal 2012 are of the view that one of the catalysts to the establishment of formal music education was the visit of different missionary groups to different parts of Nigeria, leading to the establishment of churches and schools that propagated some forms of Western music education.

Describing the non-curriculum-based music learning, Nzewi (1999, pp. 4) maintains that “Music literacy (then) (solfa notation in particular) became expedient for the Missionary and Colonial educational objectives and content. It served to produce church choirs and recreational school music.” However, the result of this initial exposure was far-reaching for many Nigerians. It provided the stimulation and bedrock on which music education flourished in Nigeria.

It has been reported in some studies that the motivation received from the early musical activities in schools and churches, which produced some choir masters, organists, composers,

singers and instrumentalists, formed the springboard on which the first generation of trained Nigerian musicians and musicologists sought for formal music education. Such aspiration and enthusiasm were further consolidated and made possible through granting of scholarships, enabling some of them to acquire formal music education abroad. Notable among such Nigerians are Robert Coker (who is famed to be the first Nigerian to study music abroad in Germany), Thomas Ekundayo Philips, Fela Sowande, William Wilberforce Chukwudinka Echezona, Olaolu Omideyi, Lazarus Ekwueme, Akin Euba and others that studied after them. The return of the sets of Nigerians who acquired formal music education to Nigeria heightened the surge of musical activities in churches, radio corporations, schools and in private homes. A remarkable response to the indigenisation process favouring music education was the establishment of the first indigenous Nigerian university in 1960, at Nsukka, Enugu State, by the then President, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. His strong interest in equal attention to the study of the liberal and creative arts alongside the sciences led to the addition of music as one of the disciplines in the newly established university (Azikiwe, 1961, pp. 280-300).

The first Nigerian-trained musicologists enrolled in this university at Nsukka and graduated in 1964. While this was a significant development that formalised music education in Nigeria, one significant issue is the seeming inversion of the process, which started formal music education at the highest level of study without matching music education structures at the lower levels. This somewhat anomalous situation was grappled with in the march to the establishment and firm rooting of music education in the country. Thus, while returning music graduates settled comfortably at the higher level of study and musical expressions in broadcasting houses, choirs and universities, a huge gap was left unattended until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when music education was formally introduced at the secondary and primary levels. This initial gap is noted to be responsible for the unbalanced and weak structures at the lower tiers of music education in Nigeria. In addressing the issues raised in this discourse, the writers maintained the original structure established in Nigeria. Music at the tertiary level is discussed first, followed by the secondary level, and, lastly, the primary level. In each case, the current state and the challenges are presented while a holistic presentation of strategies for their development is concluded.

### **Current State and Challenges of Tertiary Music Education in Nigeria**

Formal music education in Nigeria was established at the tertiary level in 1961, including the discipline in the programmes of the first indigenous university of Nigeria, located at Nsukka. In the view of Okafor (2005, pp. 210), “the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was the first institution in the country to elevate the musician to a more dignified status from the previously held prejudice that a musician was a person wasted in wine, women and music.” Iloegbunam (1989, pp.53) also observes that

another morale booster for the music industry is the image of the musicians, which has changed from that of school drop-outs and never-do-wells to that of the serious-minded and upwardly mobile, positive contributors to society's improvement. Many of the country's new crops of musicians are graduates.

On his part, Ekwueme (2004, pp. 155) concludes that the training enabled a music graduate “to take his place alongside music graduates from other parts of the world”.

Since the first Department of Music, now named after Fela Sowande, was established at Nsukka, several other institutions have followed suit, expanding music education programmes in the country. At least 22 universities, no fewer than sixteen colleges of education, and one Polytechnic now offer music in their educational programmes. University

of Nigeria, Nsukka 1961, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife 1976, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka 1992, Delta State University, Abraka 1985 and University of Uyo 1982 have autonomous music departments. University of Ilorin, Ilorin; University of Lagos, Akoka 1975 and Lagos State University, Ijanikin, are Departments of Performing Arts and Cultural and Creative Arts, respectively. Music combines with other university disciplines, such as dance and theatre arts. University of Ibadan 1981 has an Institute of African Studies but has recently started a Department of Music. Idolor (2001: pp. 138-140) provides a comprehensive list of higher institutions offering music and their establishment dates. They do not offer a complete music programme like the other five departments. Some Universities have recently introduced music studies, expanding student enrolment opportunities. These are Federal University Ndufu Alike, Ikwo (FUNAI), Ebonyi State; University of Jos (UNIJOS), Plateau State; University of Calabar (UNICAL), Cross Rivers State and Anambra State University (ANSU), Anambra. Others are the University of Benin (UNIBEN), Edo State; Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUOE), Rumulumeni, Rivers State; Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma (AAUE), Edo State and Niger Delta University, Yenagoa (NDUY), Bayelsa State. The list also includes the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), Rivers State; Kwara State University (KSU), Kwara State; Godfrey Okoye University (GOU), Thinkers' Corner, Enugu; Babcock and Alvan Ikoku College of Education (AIUOE), Owerri, Imo State.

These institutions adopt bi-cultural programmes featuring studies on Western and African Music on equal footing. All the study programmes in music are anchored on the National Policy on Education, which states: "In order to encourage aesthetic, creative and musical activities, Government will make staff and facilities available for the teaching of creative arts and crafts and music..." (F. R. N.1981, pp.13). This seeming uniformity in the study programmes resulted in homogeneity in the outcomes while simultaneously constructing a link between the institutions.

In a way, the institutionalisation of formal music education at the tertiary level marks the second segment of the periodisation of the process, the first being the semi-formal period. Right from inception, the programmes' goals were laid on the professional acquisition of high-level skills for the staffing needs of the country. It was necessary to bridge the gap in capacity and professionalism. All the institutions approved the formal curriculum of the study. These adapted the model developed at Nsukka. To achieve the learning objectives, the National Universities Commission prescribed in the approved minimum academic standards for a Bachelor of Arts in Music, the need

to prepare and produce graduates of music who will be competent in musicianship both in an international sense and also in their African tradition, with an understanding of the art and science of music and tools for appreciation, analysis and practice of the world (Western European) Music, and an ability to communicate these principles to others (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989, pp. 80).

A noticeable development since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the increasing number of Nigerians teaching music in tertiary institutions, a task hitherto done by expatriates and technical staff. Local and international training of Nigerians in various aspects of traditional music made this takeover process possible.

Students from the southern part of Nigeria, predominantly Christian, dominate enrolments to study music. The north, Islam-dominated, could be better in terms of enrolment to study music. Formal music education has been domiciled in two colleges of education in Okene and Pankshin and the University of Jos that offer music in their academic programmes. Music development in the country has largely remained the affairs of the southern part of Nigeria.

This accounts for why many of the first and second generations of trained musicologists are from the South. These include composers, educators, African music researchers, performers, technologists, and conductors. Student enrolments are frequently comprised of people with high aptitude and capacity for rigorous music training in the programmes' practical, theoretical and research components. High-level commitment to skill acquisition on various instruments and voices was the norm before 2000. Significant at the time was the rigour in selecting prospective students through organised departmental auditions. Such graduates became well-known names in the industry, nationally and internationally. This calls to mind Silverman's (2007) view (as cited in Okonkwo 2013, pp. 296) that

the essence of instituting music departments in tertiary institutions is to train students in a variety of musical areas as theorists, composers, educators, producers and of course performers who perform and interpret written works with instruments and voice. This is holistically termed performance education gained from performance teaching practice.

Degrees of challenges in music education at the tertiary level have been in the country since its inception, but this increased significantly. We consider the year 2000 as the tipping point. The noticeable upward curve from then on compels focused attention and strategies for sustainable solutions. Going forward, significant changes in institutional structures, funding and general concept threw up many palpable and unprecedented challenges highlighted below.

New policy thrusts of universities hinged on a quota system for student enrolments negated the peculiarities of specific disciplines in favour of enhanced student numbers for increased fund generation. In this way, Departments of Music in many institutions witnessed unprecedented spikes in student admission drawn from candidates cut off from other courses they opted to study. Without much preparation and aptitude for the music discipline, many "conscripted" music students enter their studies with disinterest and disappointment with the new experience. Such disgruntled students become unreceptive to the music learning processes. They become choked, confused and frustrated without meaningful achievements during their studies. Prior to this time, student enrolments into music were controlled, low and highly selective, ensuring the selection of students with high motivation and talent for the studies (The second author had presented a detailed discussion on professionalism in music studies in contemporary Nigeria in a keynote paper during the National Conference of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists in 2015). Lowering the standards became the norm to accommodate the student's capacity in the new scheme. This also brought some unacceptable underlying social and academic factors that weakened the process.

At the top of the concerns is the quality of new staffing of the various institutions. With the increase in enrolment comes the need for more staff drawn from within. Noticeable apparent weaknesses in the quality, skills and ability of many such staff became challenging. In many instances, the standard is not maintained as a result of teachers' inability more than it is the fault of the students. This is frequently the case with music instrument teachers. For instance, whereas the entry requirement for undergraduate studies stipulates the possession of Grade V of Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) London, Trinity College, London, or Music Society of Nigeria (MUSON), Lagos, many students pass through practical examinations using works below Grade One. Preparatory Lessons in Small Wood Piano Tutors are used in some deplorable situations. Such anomaly has persisted in order to accommodate the weaknesses in the system. Professionalism has remained at the bottom of the requirements for graduation due to the quality of student enrolment.

The propagation of Western cultural and musical norms through educational curricula and its effects on music evolution in Nigeria and Africa has received scholarly attention (Nzewi, 1988, p. 8; Okafor 1992, pp. 8-9; Nzewi, 1999b, p. 72). Curriculum-based formal music pedagogy has been blamed for the discipline's lack of progress and development. Many African and Nigerian scholars, composers and educators (Uzoigwe, 1992; Omojola, 1997; Nzewi 1997; Nzewi 1999a) have variously and in concert raised the concern and need for a best practice for developing Africa-sensitive music education model(s). In one such observation, Okafor (1992, pp. 8-9) wrote:

Examining music education in Nigeria presents the observer with an immediate and glaring anomaly. Music education focuses on Western music, music transplanted or introduced into the culture of indigenous Nigeria from an outside culture. The syllabus of the educational system, the curriculum content, and the philosophy and thrusts of the institutions which teach music strongly emphasise Western music.

He believes curriculum content, methodology, and teaching approach alienate students from their cultural background. Nzewi (1998) also observed that learners' cultural backgrounds had been ignored in Nigeria's music education approach so far. Advocating for an African-based music curriculum, Idolor (2005, pp. 87) submitted that "at the tertiary level, the music curriculum should be established on African music theory and practice; however, with an inclusion of music contents of other cultures of the world". These views evoke Masoga's (2006, pp.48) position that "it is wise to start with knowledge about the local area which students are familiar with, and then gradually move to the knowledge about regional, national and global environments". In line with these observations, a national conference was held in May 2019, by the Conference of Music Educators in Nigerian (COMEN, now Society for Music Educators in Nigeria, SOMEN), at the University of Port Harcourt, on the theme "Africa-Sensed Music Education in Nigeria", in which the second author delivered the Keynote Paper. The conference brought experts and scholars together to deliberate on the issues of curricular contents, nature and focus for music education in Nigeria. Thus, curriculum direction remains a critical issue in Nigerian music education discourse.

Other persistent issues in contemporary Nigerian music education are societal, institutional, religious (particularly in the northern parts of Nigeria), and peer pressures against the choice of music as an option in education. There needs to be better funding, lack of support, poor attitude, lack of pride and commitment to choosing music as a career path.

### **Secondary School Music Education in Nigeria (Current State and Challenges)**

The current form of formal music education was introduced at the secondary school level in the late 1970s but became active in 1981 following the Nigerian National Policy on Education. It took about ten years of formal music existence at the tertiary level for its establishment at the lower level. Music was formally taught at the junior classes in Government Secondary School, Owerri, Imo State, in 1981. Available indicators showed that music teaching was active in selected urban schools and some privately owned schools, mostly in western Nigeria. Government Colleges, Federal Colleges (Unity Schools, as they are called), Mission Schools and elite private schools introduced music subjects in the school program. By the latter part of the 1980s, many schools had introduced some form of formal music teaching and learning in southern Nigeria's urban areas. Music teachers were employed

in some of the schools. In many such schools, it was a recreational subject that prepared students for end-of-year school activities. They raised choirs, dance groups, and marching bands and taught learners aspects of the rudiments of music. Only now, music is an accepted and popular school subject in Nigeria. Emielu (2013, pp. 206) believes that

music is endangered in Nigerian schools; very few schools offer it at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. For example, out of about 280 secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria, as of 2002, only 18 schools offered music as a curriculum subject and were only at the junior secondary level.

He stated further that music is almost nonexistent at the senior secondary school level, as it is competing with many other subjects for acceptance. According to Anya-Njoku (2012, pp. 167), “the non-popularity of music as a school subject is quite evident, even without much investigation”. She supports her view with student enrolment in national Schools Certificate Examinations where music is almost nonexistent. School music education in contemporary Nigeria has thus needed better acceptance, recognition and output.

A recent development is the collapsing of music, as an autonomous subject, into a new curriculum called Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) which came into effect in 2008 (NERDC, 2009) at the Upper Basic level (Junior Secondary School 1-3). The CCA was first proposed in Nigeria at the Lagos Curriculum Conference in 1969 (Olaosebikan, 1982). The curriculum combines music, fine arts and drama as one school subject. A recurring outcome of this development is further relegation of music in favour of the other subjects owing to many factors bothering as lack of qualified teachers to handle the music component, students' disinterest, lack of teaching resources and generally poor perception of the subject. Currently, music is taught at the Junior Secondary School level in this new form. It is almost nonexistent at the senior level in most Nigerian schools due to a lack of foundational capacity, continuity, the elective status of the subject and other challenges. In a way, the new curriculum needs to promote serious music studies at the senior secondary level. While the school program provides for autonomy of the subject at the senior level, there are new components and higher tasks for which the junior level needs to prepare learners. The recurring response has been to abandon the subject or to resort to private coaching. Music education at this level has remained in this unbalanced and shallow-cultivation mode since its inception. The lack of proper grounding and capacity of teachers at this level constitute additional significant recent setbacks in cultivating the subject. Writers have mainstreamed poor quality of teachers, curriculum implementation challenges, lack of teaching resources, religious and societal biases and misconceptions as some of the challenges of music education at this level.

### **Primary School Music Education in Nigeria (Current State and Challenges)**

Music education was formally introduced in the primary school programme in the 1980s. Despite the existence of music in the school curriculum, the programme was made up of singing, dancing, folktale songs, storytelling, and background music for school dramas, among others, without teaching the theory of music. Most primary schools adopted this posture, particularly in the rural areas. In some urban schools, however, some aspects of the teaching rudiments of music were combined with the activities mentioned above and the learning of recorders and a few other musical instruments. Many schools sidetracked curricula provisions due to a need for more human resources and resources. However, music was taught and examined as an autonomous subject in some university staff schools, elite expatriate schools and private schools.

Structural changes were set in motion with the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system in 2008, the current 9-year Universal Basic Education (UBE) (NERDC 2009). This changed the status quo of many school subjects, including music. The CCA curriculum was introduced to the teaching and learning of music at this level. Again three subject areas were collapsed into one subject. This created the problem of area(s) of focus for the teachers. Considerations took the lines of their subjects of strength and interest.

Consequently, music was further relegated to the background in favour of subjects such as fine arts, drama or dance. Similar challenges witnessed at the upper basic characterise music at the primary level. With many classroom teachers needing to be equipped to teach the new subject, the focus is shifted to any aspect they consider enjoyable to the pupils. The fine arts component has been generally favoured, followed by dance and drama. With prejudices against the music subject, it is usually sacrificed for others or employed as background to others. Contemporary Nigerian formal music education has continued to witness challenges at the primary level in non-provision of facilities, lack of qualified teachers, curriculum implementation issues, misconceptions, the hegemony of other subjects and socio-religious biases.

### **Strategies for Sustainable Development of Formal Music Education in Contemporary Nigeria**

Existing literature on formal music education in Nigeria mainstream challenges confronting the process. Okafor 2005, pp. 236-241; Nwabufo 2014, pp. 28; Modeme 2014, pp. 82-83; Kayode 2017, pp. 268-269; Onwuekwe 2018, pp. 69-70; Ayoola 2018, pp. 154-155; Fagbile and Olabiwonninu 2018, pp. 225-226 have all outlined such challenges in their writings. They have also presented possible solutions addressing aspects of the identified challenges. They raised issues of facilities (musical instruments, books, teaching resources, classrooms), cultural bias, lack of societal cum governmental support, religious misconceptions, funding, curriculum leanings, students' attitude, capacity and quality of teachers, among other issues. While recognising the need for a holistic approach to the solutions drawn from concerted efforts of stakeholders, it is the view of the writers that drastic action needs to be pursued to deliberately reverse the dwindling fortunes of music education at all levels and set a new trend and relevance going forward. Music is culture. This position drives all efforts, passion and processes in capacity building in music practice. This requires that the cultural foundation of music education must be firmly defined and clear to enable strong rooting of the learning process.

Since its inception, the country has grappled with a dual cultural music education posture, constraining more significant abandonment of the indigenous knowledge component. Learning has been shared on bi-cultural terms but with greater emphasis on the Western component seen as the measure of formal music knowledge. Until now, Western music knowledge and skills represent and endorse formal music knowledge acquisition in Nigeria and many parts of Africa. Bi-cultural curriculum emphasis has been noted and challenged by stakeholders. Weak outcomes have also been noted in the process due to a need for more focus. A reverse back to African cultural and creative principles, norms and practices is recommended for sustainable development in music education in Nigeria. This is in sync with the general yearnings of educators. This has been discussed as Africa-sensed music education (Solbu, 2003; DjeDje, 2003; Onyeji, 2017; Onyeji & Onyeji, 2018; Onyeji, 2020). As a cultural product, music education rooted in African creative principles would draw and develop its resources from indigenous materials. The curriculum would emphasise and be hinged on learners' cultural background, while local resources would drive output. Formal music education would, besides being culturally accessible to learners, avoid the crises of

unavailability of Western resources for teaching and learning currently hampering sustainable development.

The general situation in many institutions reveals the unavailability of the required resources needed to teach the Western component of the study programme. The learning process would strive for cultural identity in formal music learning. This would be in line with current global practices. Music graduates need to be proficient in Western art music and African indigenous music. This Phenomenon breeds alienated trained musicians. Music education rooted in Nigerian culture would overcome cultural bias, with all the cultural entities of the country accommodated in an inclusive curriculum. Africa-sensed curriculum, therefore, would prioritise Africanity, Africaness and Africa in music practice, creativity and education. It would stimulate identity, negotiate and process distinctive features of Africa's musical heritage in various perspectives of music education. This would create a balance negotiated from within the Nigerian culture in music education at all levels.

The CCA has its prototype from the total theatre in indigenous societies of Africa. However, the curriculum needs more qualified teachers to handle implementation challenges. A sustainable solution would be to provide capacity to teachers before deployment urgently. It is further recommended that music be granted autonomy at the junior secondary level to build capacity for engagement at the Senior Secondary level. The current state does not enable continuity. It is critical for schools offering music at the junior level to recruit teachers at the senior level to leverage continuity. Capacity building and professionalism of learners need to be addressed at the tertiary level by raising and insisting on the standard. It is also significant to grant autonomy to the Departments of Music in selecting students for enrolment. The current practice needs to be more sustainable and stifling, creating a more potent form of the process.

## Conclusion

This article discussed formal music education at the different tiers of education in Nigeria with particular reference to their current state, challenges and sustainable solutions. Evidence from the study revealed a persistent waning in interest and other critical challenges confronting the music subject. It was argued that low-capacity music teachers, dwindling resources, societal prejudices, misconceptions, curricular issues, funding and religious bias have persisted, and these impede the music education process. The various tiers of learning have their fair share of the issues raised. Autonomy in the student enrolment process at the tertiary level and music as a junior secondary level subject are effective solutions. The Africa-sensed curriculum at all levels of study, critical support and capacity building for teachers are also recommended sustainable solutions.

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