

# MUSIC IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION

by

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## Introduction

Since the 1950s, the governments of the western and eastern regions of Nigeria have invested more of their revenues in education than in any other sector of development. This was a shift from the old Colonial system in which education, consisting mainly of literacy and numeracy, served only to provide workers for the Colonial Civil Service.

According to the National Policy on Education:

Education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise, but a huge Government venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of Government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation. The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted education as an instrument par excellence for effecting national development...Government has also stated that for the benefit of all citizens the country's educational goals in terms of its relevance to the needs of the individual as well as in terms of the kind of society desired in relation to the environment and the realities of the modern world and rapid social changes should be clearly set out. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p.5)

It went further to state that:

Nigeria's philosophy on education, therefore, is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p.7)

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1989 in Chapter II No. 19 states that:

- (1) Government shall direct its policy toward ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.
  - (2) Government shall promote science and technology.
  - (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end Government shall as and when practicable provide —
    - (a) free, compulsory and universal primary education;
    - (b) free secondary education;
    - (c) free university education; and
    - (d) free adult literacy programme.
  - (4) Government shall promote the learning of indigenous languages.
- (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989, Official Gazette no. 29, vol. 76, chapter II, no.19)

Under the Directive Principles of the Nigerian Constitution (chap. II no. 19), education is listed as a right of the Nigerian citizen. Music education is part of the educational enterprise.

## Music in education

In the traditional Nigerian society music was an integral part of education. A musician was often expected to practice other areas of the arts and occupations. There were musical families with long traditions of music making. There were instrument

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makers who were also expected to practice other areas of occupation. Training in music often involved a long period of apprenticeship during which the trainee learned other aspects of the art. For example, the minstrel made simple instruments. But he could also be a farmer, a hunter, someone who practiced other types of occupations. In other words, in the traditional society, music was integrated not only with the arts but with life. Thus, music enjoyed a type of prestige and respect. There was no distinction or dichotomy between an amateur and a professional musician. Music was a noble art and it was the quality of his music that determined the prestige of the performer or the artist.

Through song texts, a person learned the moral codes of his land, its chronology and history, and the guiding principles and ethics of his land. He also learned about his own language, the things his people lived by, and how the society worked. All these were learned through music that ranged from simple folk tunes to highly specialized ritual music, including chants, incantations and minstrelsy.

Modern society has made music an abstract art or discipline — a specialized subject studied apart from life and the activities of the immediate environment. This has created problems concerning the rank of music and the characterization of a musician as either a specialized and respected member of society or someone who practices the musical art or profession because he can do nothing else. Not the case in the traditional society, it is now possible to rank a musician as a failure in some areas of life but as a success on some favored or prestigious musical instrument. There is even a dichotomy between the professional and "amateur" musician. This supports Merriam's (1964) views that professionalism "...is usually defined in terms of whether the musician is paid for and supported economically by his skill" (p.124) and that "...some musicians do depend upon their music activities for total economic support of their way of life" (p.126). It should be noted that the so-called amateur musician was the musician of traditional society. Because music was integral with other forms of the arts and with life, it was possible for him to combine musicianship with other forms of occupation and the arts. In modern society, particularly the society created by Western education and civilization, a professional musician does not follow other professions.

### **Music education in Nigeria**

Music education has come a long way from the colonial times when most of the music education in an institution consisted of singing class in primary or secondary school or the teacher training college. Now, music has become a subject, albeit not a well-ranked subject, in Nigerian educational institutions. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), must be mentioned and praised for the trail it blazed in music education of the country. UNN had the first college of music in Africa, and it produced a core of people trained in music as well as other disciplines. It placed strong emphasis on the study of the traditional music of the country. 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. Following UNN's example, teacher training institutions and secondary and tertiary institutions in the country have begun to establish departments of music. They have been able to employ professionally trained or certificated teachers to teach music. In that respect, the status of music education has risen from the amateur and mainly

singing status of the institutions of the colonial era to the present status in which music can be studied more systematically and more professionally. Presently, music education not only trains people in musicianship, but also educates them to train other musicians.

It is pertinent here to examine the quality of the people who train musicians under the present educational system in the country. The teacher could be the product of teacher training colleges that train the musician mainly in the art of singing or playing an instrument or the teacher might be an untrained person with exquisite talent who trains a musician for a popular band, a guitar band, or even for the practice of traditional music or dance (Okafor, 1989b).

Since the establishment in the 1960s of the Advanced Teacher Training Colleges (ATTC), which later became the Colleges of Education, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the quality of the teachers has risen. Music educators have fallen into several classes: (a) the traditional master musician who trains his own people mainly by apprenticeship, (b) the trained musician in the Western educational system who knows all the rudiments and the rules and who has certain objectives he wishes to attain, and (c) the untrained talented musician (Okafor, 1989a).

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka, produced the first group of graduates and diplomates in music. Since the introduction of the Advanced Teachers Certificate and/or the Nigerian Certificate of Education, the Advanced Teacher Training Colleges and the Colleges of Education have started producing musicians whose main function is to teach and train people. Students have been provided some organized training in the context of the National Policy on Education, and to a certain degree, this training has equipped them to function within the guidelines and objectives set by the country, the society, and its educational system.

The educational infrastructure of the country can be defined loosely as consisting of the educational institutions, the educators themselves, and the appurtenances of teaching. As previously mentioned, it was the universities, the colleges of education, the churches, the secondary schools, and the teacher training colleges which carried out the main music education in an organized way. This can be said only if we ignore the apprenticeship system used by the traditional society for the teaching and transmission of music. The tertiary, secondary, and primary schools were equipped mainly with Western musical instruments, and the teachers (those who were respected among them) were those trained in Western education. Therefore, the prestige of music education for decades relied mainly on the quality of Western musical education that the teacher or the musician had received. This system ignored or snubbed the traditional music education, traditional music, as well as popular music on which most of the music industry depended for survival. Under this system, the best educated musicians in the society were the most poorly remunerated. The uneducated, those who had "nothing at all" but whose music was popular, were those who earned a lot by their music. We, therefore, have the anomaly that "good" music is not worth its hire.

For the goals of music education, we can take our cue from 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... (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p.13)

**Furthermore:**

In order that these functions may be discharged efficiently, a cadre of staff is required in adequate numbers and quality at the different operational levels in the local, State and Federal institutions.

If we interpret this fully, it means that the product of music education in Nigeria, that is the person who has received quality music education, must be able to function as a musician at the best and highest levels of the country's economy. He must not only earn his living but must be able to use music as a tool for national economic development. It follows, therefore, that in assessing the success or failure of the music education policy, we must determine what the product of the system has been able to do to develop the country's economy. It is in this respect that we shall examine the music industry. By music industry, we mean all the institutions that produce, package, distribute, and preserve music.

Our first consideration is the musician. The most lucrative areas are those which bring the musician in contact and favor with the masses — the popular music output of the music industry. The country's popular music output is respectable and ranges from the music of the urban society (where the interplay of cultures creates its own sounds) to the popular music of the countryside and the hybrid or neo-traditional genre (that is, a bit of the country, a bit of the town, and a bit of the non-Nigerian). The musician who operates most successfully in this area is either the inspired one, one who has undergone an apprenticeship or attachment, one who is self-taught and largely "unqualified", or the musician who has trained in both worlds, but very rarely the academic. Perhaps, there is something in the saying that a musician is born, not made.

Another sector of the music industry involves the distribution of music and its production, including the gramophone recording companies, those who put music either on discs or on tapes for sale, those who computerize music and distribute their *musique concrete*, and those whose job it is to print and publish music. The music workforce (the entire labor force in its various numbers from the technician to the designer, the packaging hand, and the music promoter) need organized musical training to make the wheels of the music industry turn with appropriate rhythm. The managers, the executives, and the proprietors of the music industry occupy one sector. They make decisions with wide-ranging effects. They control the entire industry and often decide what may or may not happen and how, what remuneration or royalty goes to the artist, and what contracts are written. The final sector consists of the teachers of music who help to expand the music industry and to improve its quality. The effect on the masses of the teacher's informal education is often found in the musical tastes in the environment in which the mass media, especially the electronic mass media, operates. How able is the product of our music education to operate in this complex establishment?

An examination of music education in Nigeria presents the observer with an immediate and glaring anomaly. The focus of music education itself appears to be on Western music, music transplanted or introduced into the culture of the indigenous Nigerian from an outside culture. The syllabus of the educational system, the curriculum content, and the philosophy and thrusts of the institutions which teach music place strong emphasis on Western music. The student and even the Nigerian teacher of this type of music will, therefore, have to grapple first with an understanding of the music, an understanding of

the culture, and an understanding of the method of teaching it. The measure of the trained or educated musician is one who knows about counterpoint, the history and literature of Western music, etc. Let us hasten to say that musical insularism is not being advocated. That would be counterproductive. The roots of our music education and its relevance must be in our culture and environment. A new scale of emphases and priorities in this matter needs to be set.

Added to the problem of the curriculum content is that of materials for teaching – the teaching aids and even the musical instruments themselves – which are often abstracted from an entirely different culture. For example, the Nigerian professor of the Hellenic instruments or one who teaches the violin in a Nigerian school has to understand the violin mainly from studies and theory. There is no organized workshop for the making of violins in Nigeria. There are not too many orchestras using violins and the violin teacher probably began his studies late. His students have even greater problems. They may never touch a bow throughout the introduction of the course. In the violin class, the teacher may find it difficult to socialize some of the subjects. He uses classical music in the classroom and emerges to face a surge of sounds of other types of music – the traditional music, folk music, popular music, and music brought in by modern methods of telecommunication (radio, television, cinema, tape recorder, and video recorder). Thus, the teacher finds it difficult to be relevant.

The music studied in the classroom is not the music that moves and develops the economy. One finds mainly Western popular music and neo-traditional popular music which are very important in the society and in the economy. This is what one hears at parties and in the media. This is the music that the teacher knows has made people at least comfortable in life through earnings from royalties. Yet he would understand that the makers of the music that moves the economy and the makers of the music that is most relevant in society are people he would regard as uneducated in music and the arts. Since he literally ignores the traditional music and the popular music, the teacher finds that his learning has become largely "for learning's sake".

The musician trained under our present system of education is also vulnerable in another way. He is vulnerable to any surge of nationalism in the country. When there is any readjustment of the economy, he finds that the instruments on which he is proficient and for which he is famous may not be easy to import into the country. He finds that the leaders prefer people who are proficient in the type of music that is in synchrony with the culture and with the nationalistic favor of the country. It may sound very unimportant, but at one point or the other, nationalism has to flow into any art music or any music created by any systematic training. That is what makes the music live and have a stamp. And so, the person who is trained in the original or in traditional culture, or the person who is brought up with or has better grounding in the popular music of his country, or the person who uses these as the foundation for greater works of art will always find that he has contributed more to the development of music and to the human spirit in his country.

The student of music in Nigeria finds difficulty in adjusting his personality and in tuning it to the environment. He has grown up with one type of music – the music that is actually overflowing at every state of his life cycle or life rites. Then, at a later stage in

his life, he extricates himself from that to study Western music. In a short time, before he has tuned his personality to the Western music, his course of study is over and he is back to the environment again, ever struggling to adjust and to be acceptable, even to find acceptance for what he has studied. This makes it difficult for him to be a good and fully proficient musician. First, his exposure to the instruments and to the techniques he studied in the higher institutions of learning has not been long enough. His exposure to the traditional music is no longer effective because it has been interrupted. The student thus faces a crisis – elitism in the study of Western music and less favor for the person who practices the folk and popular music of his country. Music must be studied properly and we must know other musical cultures. What is difficult and different in Nigeria is that one type of music has been downplayed in favor of the other and what is favored by a greater percentage of the population is largely ignored by the music educators; what is gaining great popularity, largely because of the influence of the electronic media comes from outside the culture.

What must we do for the musician to be attuned to his society, for the music he has studied to be relevant to the society and to the economy, and for music to gain prestige and retain the prestige that it had in the past history and culture of the country?

First is a radical revision of the curriculum. There has to be some readjustment but, first and foremost, we have to know what is necessary, what has been done in the past, and what are the best things to do. For this, we recommend a review commission properly appointed, properly constituted, and having not only people who are trained in Western music, but master musicians, popular musicians, electronic media managers, music promoters, and scholars of ethnomusicology. The commission should determine what role music can play if only certain things are done; a reorganization of the curriculum, staff development, and the development of a musical instrument technology that will enable us to be less dependent on imported technology. The method and degree of implementation must be appropriate. Unfortunately, there is a hiatus in the implementation. One must frankly raise a serious question about the quality of music educators. Some of them have received a rather poor education. The axiom that "No one can give what he doesn't have" applies here. The National Policy on Education recognizes this by stating that "No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers" and further, "All teachers in our educational institutions, from pre-primary to university, will be professionally trained" (p.38). The training program should be aggressive and include re-training. Then standards and traditions of excellence will begin to grow and develop.

Music should be removed from its unfortunate classification as an elective subject in our curriculum. Looking at the role it has played in Nigerian traditional society, its status and role in the present-day economy, and forward to projections for the foreseeable future, we can observe that music has been important enough to be a compulsory subject in its own right. Even a cursory observation will confirm that music is a stimulus to commerce, engineering, science, and the arts, as well as a vital aid in medicine and religion.

This recommended effort toward quality music education will require monitoring and expert guidance. As stated in the National Policy on Education:

To ensure quality control in the schools it is necessary to have good teachers and inspectors. The inspectors will be officers of the Ministry. The primary responsibility of

inspectors is to see that high standards are maintained and that schools are run in accordance with laid down regulations. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p.46)

It is unfortunate that very few, if any, of the states in this country have full, viable, and vital Inspectorates of Music. These organs of implementation and monitoring should be established and staffed with qualified people. That is the only way forward.

Another area of vital need is the availability of necessary books, preferably written with the African environment and orientation in mind. They should be scholarly books written from a wide range of Nigerian perspectives, products of fieldwork and research. The production of these books should be seen as an essential service. It is recommended that in areas where there is shortage of information, researchers, scholars, and people with deep, practical knowledge should be commissioned or encouraged to write. We need to stimulate research by grants from foundations, from government, and from well-meaning individuals.

The policy segments of government, such as the National Council on Education (NCE), the National Teachers Institute (NTI), the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCC), and the Nigerian Education Research Council (NERC), as well as examination bodies, such as the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the West African Examination Council (WAEC), and the examination boards of Nigerian tertiary institutions, need to adopt a radically new and positive approach to the study of music – relevant music in our public education. They have the ultimate responsibility to give the measure of success or failure in the various musical disciplines. This needed new and radical approach should be the product of research and wide-ranging consultations.

Popular music should be accepted as being valid music, valid in its own right and not second-rate to any other. Therefore, the institutions of higher learning should find worthy places in their disciplines and curriculum for the study and development of popular music (Okafor, 1989c).

The music that is felt and known as the musical culture of any nation is mainly the popular and traditional music. If these two are given importance in the education of the musician, then, perhaps, their importance will be fortified in the curriculum. Leonhard and House (1972) state:

Notable exceptions are found in a few European countries where the musical education of all students has become a matter of national policy, especially Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Russia. In the former country, the efforts of Zoltan Kodály resulted in a systematic and well-supported system of music education which utilizes the total musical resources of the country and its indigenous musical heritage. (p.54)

Music scholars who teach in our institutions of higher learning should realize that they do not possess all knowledge. Tremendous knowledge lies in the skills of our craftsmen, in the art of the master musicians, and even in the memories and in the poetic art of our song leaders and minstrels (Okafor, 1980). All these specialists, for so they are, should be brought into the curriculum for the education of the musician. Master musicians should be engaged on a permanent or part-time basis not only to broaden the horizons of music scholars and students but also to deepen their knowledge and to give them practice in the music of their culture. In this way, our culture will be recognized in the education of the musician. Traditional musical practice is very important and our society

should be able to accept a musician for what he is and not for what he should be in another cultural setting.

Academies of music should be established to promote the musical practice and musical excellence of the society in contrast to mere scholarship. Anambra State has taken the first steps in the establishment of an academy of music and it is hoped that, in the near future, such an academy will exist where people can be trained as practicing musicians of popular music, indigenous music, classical music, or a mixture of any of them. The need, the will, and the way to establish such academies already exist in the Nigerian society. The academies will also help Nigerian musicians to organize seminars, symposia, and colloquia to discuss ways of promoting music further and of developing the musical culture of the country, great minds interplaying and contributing to the final product.

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