

AFRICAN MUSIC THEORY IN THE MUSIC EDUCATION CURRICULA OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Some of the global educational challenges facing music educators in Nigeria include the global emphasis on science and technology and the imposition of Western musical aesthetics, theories, methods and technologies on African music. Scholars such as Meki Nzewi and Omibiyi-Obidike have fostered the campaign for freedom from this mental enslavement over the years. However, there remains a lot to be done practically in evolving the ideal music education for Nigeria. The objective of this paper is to critically evaluate the place of African music theory as a course in the music curricula of Nigerian Universities. Hinged on the indigenization and ethno-pedagogical theories, questionnaires and Interviews were used to collect the needed data from selected University teachers. Given the premise that the present situation is undesirable, the paper argued for the indispensability of African music theory in contemporary music education in Nigeria in this era of global contests. It was discovered that African music theory as contained in the current curricula is, in terms of content, 'watery' and in terms of emphasis, displaced and inadequate. This paper discussed the problems responsible for this development and recommended solutions. It concluded on the need for a restructuring of the existing programmes with a purpose of reviewing the African music theory curriculum both in emphasis and in content.

INTRODUCTION

Although the academic study of music in Nigerian Universities started about five decades ago, its curricula are yet to be free from Western domination. This has been one of the main reasons accountable for the underdevelopment of Music Education in Nigeria. This paper therefore aims at a critical evaluation of the place of African music theory as a course in the music curricula of Nigerian Universities. The purpose is to determine the extent to which Western music theory courses have dominated the African music theory courses; with a view to correcting the imbalance.

Statement of the Problem

This paper puts forward two hypotheses: (i) Music Curricula in Nigerian Universities are still Western. (ii) African music theory is under-emphasized in the music Curricula of Nigerian Universities.

It has been observed that Music Education in Africa generally has not attained a developed status, especially when compared with its Western counterpart. Also, African Music Education needs to be made relevant to the needs of the society, for it to be more embraced. Our Music Education still prepares students to be focused on Western music at the end of which they never outshine their white counterparts on Western music. Sadly enough, they only possess a little or no understanding of their own music where they have the better chance of demonstrating superiority. One of the ways to correct

these anomalies is to re-examine the place of African music theory in the curricula of our Universities.

If we compare the number of Western music theory courses and the units allocated to them with those of African music theory courses, one will understand why African music is still underdeveloped in Nigeria. It is therefore hoped that the results obtained from this research would provide basis for reviewing the African music theory curriculum both in emphasis and content wise.

There are some works already carried out in the area of African music curriculum review. Some of the notable ones include Omibiyi-Obidike (1973/4, 2001), Nzewi (1999, 2001), Vidal (2008) and Adedeji & Ajewole (2008). They have advocated and intensified a better inclusion of African music, the use of a pragmatic approach and a better voice pedagogy in African Music Education respectively.

Research Design

As a descriptive cum evaluative study, we have found survey and interview methods very useful in this work. Four (4) Universities were randomly sampled out of about twelve (12) Nigerian Universities where music is offered as a field of study. The Universities are:

1. Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (N.A.U.)
2. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (O.A.U.)
3. University of Nigeria, Nsukka (U.N.N.)
4. University of Lagos, Lagos (UNILAG)

The music curriculum of each of the Universities was examined before both Western and African music theory related courses were copied out and arranged separately according to levels. These informations that formed the raw data for this study were analyzed and discussed under analysis and discussion. Also, the contents of the selected courses were closely examined and in addition four lecturers in each of the Universities were interviewed in order to access their opinions.

The data are arranged here under four tables; each with (a) and (b) sections. Each contained the course codes, course titles and course units of music theory courses offered in the four Universities at a particular level of the degree programme.

Findings:

TABLE I (a): WESTERN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (100 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 110	Rudiments of Music	2
		MUS 111	Tonal Harmony I	2
		MUS 112	Musicianship Studies I	2
		MUS 113	Musicianship Studies II	2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 101	Music as an Art and Science	3
		MUS 111	Rudiments of Music I	3
		MUS 112	Rudiments of Music II	3
		MUS 124		

			Tonal Harmony I	3
3.	U.N.N.	MUS 111 MUS 123 MUS 124	Rudiments of Music Tonal Harmony I Tonal Harmony II	1 1 1
4.	UNILAG	MUS 111	Rudiments of Music	1
			TOTAL	24

TABLE I (b): AFRICAN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (100 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 130 MUS 131	African Music Studies I African Music Studies II	2 2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 141 MUS 142 MUS 175 MUS 176	African Music; historical and Sociological perspective African Music and Dance I African Music and Dance II	2 2 1 1
3.	U.N.N.	-	-	-
4.	UNILAG	MUS 141	Choral Practice	2
			TOTAL	12

TABLE 2 (a): WESTERN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (200 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 210 MUS 211 MUS 212 MUS 213	Tonal Harmony II Tonal Harmony III Musicianship Studies III Musicianship Studies IV	2 2 2 2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 221 MUS 223 MUS 224	Foundation of Music Tonal Harmony II Tonal Harmony III	2 3 3

3.	U.N.N.	MUS 223	Tonal Harmony III	2
		MUS 224	Tonal Harmony IV	1
4.	UNILAG	MUS 221	Tonal Harmony	3
		MUS 223	Modal Counterpoint	2
		MUS 224	Foundation of Musicianship	2
			TOTAL	26

TABLE 2 (b): AFRICAN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (200 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U	MUS 230	African Music Studies III	2
		MUS 231	African Music Studies IV	2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 241	African Music Theory	2
		MUS 242	African Music Theory	2
		MUS 275	African Music and Dance	1
		MUS 276	African Music and Dance	1
3.	U.N.N.	MUS 241	African Music: Theoretical Studies I	2
		MUS 242	African Music: Theoretical Studies II	2
4.	UNILAG	MUS 241	African Instrumental Ensemble	2
			TOTAL	16

TABLE 3 (a): WESTERN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (300 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 310	Counter Point, Fugue & Further Harmony I	2
		MUS 311	Counterpoint, Fugue & Further Harmony II	2
		MUS 314	Musicianship Studies V	2
		MUS 315	Musicianship Studies VI	2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 321	Tonal Harmony IV	3
		MUS 323	Tonal Counterpoint I	3
		MUS 324	Tonal Counterpoint II	3
		MUS 327		

			Analyses of Western Musical Form	3
3.	U.N.N.	MUS 321	Tonal Counterpoint	2
		MUS 322	Strict Counterpoint	1
4.	UNILAG	MUS 331	Form and Analysis of Tonal Music	2
		MUS 332	Advanced Musicianship	2
		MUS 333	Music Technology	2
		MUS 334	Harmony, Counterpoint and Composition	2
			TOTAL	31

TABLE 3 (b): AFRICAN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (300 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 330	African Music Studies V	2
		MUS 331	African Music Studies VI	2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 342	Analysis of African Music Form	3
		MUS375	African Music and Dance	1
		MUS 376	African Music and Dance	1
3.	U.N.N.	MUS 341	African Music: Theoretical Studies III	2
4.	UNILAG	MUS 341	Music in African Culture	1
		MUS 342	Development of African Music	1
		MUS 343	African Instrumental Ensemble	1
		MUS 344	Theory of African Music	1
			TOTAL	15

TABLE 4 (a): WESTERN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (400 Level)

S/NO.	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 410	Counter Point, Fugue & Further Harmony III	2
		MUS 411	Counter Point, Fugue & Further Harmony IV	2

2.	O.A.U.	MUS 401 MUS 421 MUS 425 MUS 428	Acoustics and Psychoacoustics of Music 20 th Cent. Composition Technique Orchestration II Analysis and Analytical Method for 20 th C. Composition	3 3 3
3.	U.N.N.	MUS 422 MUS 425 MUS 427	Fugue Analysis of Tonal Music Analysis and Analytical Method for 20 th C. Music	2 2 2
4.	UNILAG	MUS 411 MUS 413 MUS 414 MUS 421 MUS 423	Fugue and Fugal Technique Further Musicianship 20 th Century Compositional Technique Orchestration Acoustics and Psycho-acoustics of Music	2 2 2 2 2
			TOTAL	27

TABLE 4 (b): AFRICAN MUSIC THEORY COURSES (400 Level)

S/NO	INSTITUTION	COURSE CODE	COURSE TITLE	COURSE UNITS
1.	N.A.U.	MUS 430 MUS 431	African Music Advanced Topics I African Music Advanced Topics II	2 2
2.	O.A.U.	MUS 486	African Music in Schools	3
3.	U.N.N.	MUS 441	African Music: Historiography, Theoretical Issues and Contemporary Development	3
4.	UNILAG	MUS 441	African Music in Schools	2
			TOTAL	12

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

From the data above, it is obvious that Western music theoretical courses receive more emphasis over African music theory in the music curricula of the selected Universities. The imbalance created by this lopsidedness is grave. For instance under table 1 (a and b), the number of units of Western music theory courses (100 level) in the four Universities are NAU 8, OAU 12, UNN 3 and UNILAG 1. The units of African music theory courses are NAU 4, OAU 6, UNN 0 and UNILAG 1. The unit ratio in each of the University are NAU 8 – 4, OAU 12 – 6, UNN 3 – 0 and UNILAG 1 – 1, while the total

unit ratio is 24 – 12. In University of Nigeria, Nsukka, not even a single African music theory course is offered at the 100 level. It is only in UNILAG that we have equal number of unit for Western and African music theory courses. However, the total unit ratio shows a wide gap of disparity against African music theory.

Table 2 (a and b) reveals the following details: the units of Western music theory courses (200 level) in the four Universities are NAU 8, OAU 8, UNN 3 and UNILAG 7, while that of African music theory are NAU 4, OAU 6, UNN 4 and UNILAG 2. The unit ratios in each are NAU 8 – 4, OAU 8 – 6, UNN 3 – 4 and UNILAG 7 – 2, while the total unit ratio is 26 – 16. It is only in the UNN curriculum that the units of African music theory outnumber Western music theory by 1, yet the unit ratio in other Universities and the total unit ratio reveal the dominance of Western music theory courses at the 200 level.

Under table 3 (a and b), the units of Western music theory courses (300 level) in the four Universities are NAU 8, OAU 12, UNN 3 and UNILAG 8, while those of African music are NAU 4, OAU 5, UNN 2 and UNILAG 4. The unit ratios in the Universities are NAU 8 – 4, OAU 12 – 5, UNN 3 – 2 and UNILAG 8 – 4. The total unit ratio is 31 – 15. Both the unit ratio of each of the universities and the total unit ratio of the 300 level courses reveal the under-representation of African music theory courses.

As shown in table 4 (a and b), the units of Western music theory courses at the 400 level in the four Universities are NAU 4, OAU 9, UNN 6 and UNILAG 8. The units of African music theory courses are NAU 4, OAU 3, UNN 3 and UNILAG 2; thus creating the ratio of NAU 4 – 4, OAU 9 – 3, UNN 6 – 3 and UNILAG 8 – 2. The total unit ratio is 27 – 12. Except in NAU where we have equilibrium, both the unit ratios in other universities and the total unit ratio demonstrate the dominance of Western music theory over African music theory.

It can be observed from the above findings and the analysis that a very wide gap exists between Western and African music theory courses in Nigerian Universities music curricula; thus verifying the two assumptions put forward in this paper. Furthermore on the dominance of Western music in our Universities music curricula, everyone that had their Music Education in Nigeria are living witnesses to the fact that right from part I, Western Music Literature or History, Western music theory, foundation of Western musicianship are taught fairly well. Currently at Obafemi Awolowo University, only one African music course is taken in each semester as a compulsory course. This is not good enough! It is an open secret that most of the founding fathers that drew the music curricula for Nigerian tertiary institutions were trained abroad. In addition, ironically, it is a known fact that there is no way Africans can beat the Westerners in their own music. What is then reasonable is for Africans to develop their own indigenous music, for there lies their greatness and true comparability.

Secondly, African music theory as a course is not given its proper place in the curriculum in most cases. In most institutions in Nigeria, theoretical elements in Western music are well structured, outlined and taught extensively. For instance at Obafemi Awolowo University; Western harmony is taught and emphasized as a course, in one form or the other, for three years out of four, while African harmony is just taught as a topic under African music theory in two semesters. At the end of their programmes, students who would specialize in African Musicology are required to undertake projects or essays in African music. This is abnormal!

In addition, a close study of the contents of the courses shows that a particular African music theory course listed may not be taught in-depth. For instance, African music theory courses should include all the subjects treated under Western music theory and in addition should touch all elements peculiar

to African music. General issues should include among others, Rudiments (pitch, intervals, scales, rhythm, melody etc), harmony, counterpoint, musicianship, forms, analysis, acoustics, composition. Other peculiar areas include vocal and instrumental organizations, and metaphysical dimensions. Although the cultural background is always stressed (if not overstressed), it should however not be done at the expense of the real 'thing'. More African music courses should be taught in-depth; for this is when our music could compete well in contemporary global music scholarship and practice.

Other Related Problems

As gathered from the music lecturers interviewed, there are pertinent problems that are responsible for the displacement of African Music Theory in the Curricula of Nigerian Universities. The problems identified include lack of vision, lack of systematized body of theory; lack of materials, shortage of specialists and the imposition of Nigerian Universities Commission's Guideline. These problem need to be discussed as to proffer solutions to them.

Lack of Vision

80% of the music lecturers interviewed are of the opinion that Nigerian music educators have not envisioned the indigenization of music education that would lead to its freedom. Despite the enormous research carried out on African music, we still want to reason like the whites, try to impress the whites and define our ideals through Western parameters. Although Omibiyi-Obidike (1973/4, 2001) has always advocated for this change in her works, no radical step has been taken till date. This is the bane of our music education.

Lack of Systematized Body of Theory

The crucial need for the systematization of African music theories has been argued in some of my previous works (Adedeji, 2004, 2006). 75% of musicologists interviewed agreed that systematizing African music theories is indispensable for the needed development of African music as a field. It is not that the theoretical principles underlying the practice of African music are not there but they are not codified, systematized or developed into a body. A big cog in the wheel is the divergent nature of African music itself, based on its heterogeneous setting. It is practically impossible for a single person to make a comprehensive set of theories for the practice of African music that would satisfy all the variants that exist in it. In *Music of Africa* by Nketia (which is regarded as the most comprehensive so far), the author used typologies from various but limited musical cultures of Africa. In addition, the models used are predominantly from the author's background. The author also discussed the theoretical elements from socio-cultural perspectives and hence the pedagogical approach is left out. Also, in the numerous works of Vidal (some of which are listed under References), he dealt extensively on theoretical issues such as rhythm, form and tonality in Yoruba music. His write ups were however purely academic and not pedagogic in approach. Hence there is still the need for a pedagogic systematization of his assertions that will result from a deductive analysis of the works. The works of other musicologists and theorists such as Kubik (1994), Agawu (1995), Akpabot (1972) etc., also fall in either of the two categories described above. The essence of this discussion is to explain that one of the ways to improve on the place of African music theory in the music curricula of Nigerian universities is to have the theoretical principles systematized into a body.

Lack of Materials

Unlike Western music theory, which has many textbooks, there are no books on the pedagogy of African music theory. It should be mentioned that it is easy to teach Western music theory since there are numerous books written on it. Some of the popular textbooks on Western music theory include

Graded Music Course for Schools (Vols. 1-3), *Rudiments and Theory of Music (ABRSM)* and *the AB Guide to Music Theory (2 Vols)*. One of the few teaching books on music theory written by Africans, which also focused on Western music, is *Music for Schools by Inanga (1991, 1993, 2002)*. The recent efforts of Mereni (2004a, 2004b) and Nzewi (2005) are highly commendable but the books are not yet available to the public.

Shortage of Specialists

Another major problem is shortage of specialists in African music theory. This problem stemmed from the fact that most of the pioneers of music education in Nigeria were given scholarship in overseas' institutions to specialize in Ethnomusicology. As some of the people interviewed have remarked, ethnomusicology has its own blessings when we talk of the growth of African musicology, but the argument here is that the pioneers should have been more diversified in their specialization or delved into other specialized areas after their higher degrees for which they were given scholarships. The situation on ground currently has not changed remarkably. There are few people trying to specialize in theory, composition, performance, music education or ethnomusicology but they are either half-baked or ill prepared. Currently, there are very few music theorists. Besides, the multiple roles assigned to lecturers in higher institutions have further compounded the problem. For instance, though not formally stated but it is generally assumed and expected that a lecturer in music in Nigeria should be a musicologist, a performer, a composer, a theorist, a music educator and a researcher at the same time. Because of shortage of specialists, courses are distributed disregarding specialization. This is not ideal also.

Nigerian Universities Commission Guideline

Although the NUC Guideline accommodated some Africaness, its pro-Western outlook is obvious with the dominance of Western music courses. Hence, the current syllabus approved for music by the Nigerian Universities Commission puts Western music above African music. In addition, prerequisites for specialized areas are not well catered for. A case study is composition, which should have got more theoretical courses as prerequisites.

Recommendations

In view of the problems highlighted above, we make the following recommendations. Firstly, African musicologists and theorists should as a matter of urgency work on the systematization of the theory of African music. An easy way out is to approach the task from local angles. For instance, we may approach it on country-by-country basis or employ an ethnic-based approach such as Yoruba, Igbo, Akan or Ewe.

Secondly, musicologists and music educators should intensify efforts on publishing books on rudiments and theory of African music. For it is then that we can have the raw materials needed for teaching African music theory in our Universities.

Thirdly, in order to correct the inadequacy of African music theory in the Universities' curricula, we recommend a reduction in the numbers of Western music courses that have little or no relevance to contemporary African situations or at least reduce their units to accommodate more courses on African music. Another option is to readjust the contents of some of the Western music theory courses to include African music. For instance, courses like Tonal Harmony and Tonal Counterpoint should be extended to treat both Western and African elements concurrently. Furthermore, the issue of specialization should be more encouraged in the academic study of music in Nigeria. In addition, African music theory as an area of specialization should be developed by training more specialists in it.

Lastly, the NUC should give the Universities autonomy as regards what to teach. It should only moderate and not impose any guideline. Sometimes the expert in a particular field as a member of the NUC curriculum committee may have biases, which may not favour the ideals of a particular University. Necessary checks and balances should therefore be put in place.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to establish the facts that Music Education in Nigerian Universities is still more Western and that African music theory is still under-emphasized in the music curricula of Nigerian Universities. Not only have we also identified the problems we have proffered solutions in the recommendations. While Western music theory cannot but be used as a reference point or as framework for understanding African music theory, we should stop infusing more Western music than Africa music into the heads of our students. It is either we learn the two side by side, using the former as a basis for understanding the latter or we first teach Western music in early years and African music in later years. African musicologists and theorists both at home and abroad should then come together and do something urgently to address the issues raised in this paper. I strongly believe that music as a discipline in Africa, especially in Nigeria, has not developed as it ought to. To my mind, we have not explored the chances that we have. In Abroad, we have giants from Nigeria that are contributing to the development of African music at the international or global level, while very little is contributed at the 'home' level. These great scholars should come together and organise conferences at 'home' to advance the development of African music.

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