

AFRICA-SENSED MUSIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: SETTING NEW PARADIGMS AND RELEVANCE FOR NIGERIA IN THE GLOBAL MUSIC SPACE

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Introduction

Critical discourses on music education have mainstreamed perceptions on Eurocentric curricular and methodological trajectories of music education in Nigeria and Africa in general, arising from the colonial contacts of many of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa as well as the training of music educators so far. Concerns have been raised concertedly and repeatedly by the Community of Music Educators (CoME) on the perceived cultivation of Western norms and ideals against African musical heritage and values in post-contact Africa. Elsewhere, I (Onyeji, 2017), have noted that:

There is a growing feeling of exclusion, otherness and loss of identity in musical arts studies in many African formal learning institutions at the moment. This arises from the constant structuring of teaching and learning of musical arts along Western patterns in content and methodology. Dovetailing from Africa's contact with the West, the formative experiences and expertise there-from of musical arts educators in African institutions have been quite limited to the exclusive training rooted in Western structures and practice. (2)

The propagation of Western cultural and musical norms in Africa through educational curricular for music has been variously noted and argued against by many other music pundits in Africa (Nzewi 1999: p. 72; Herbst, 2005: p. vi.; Okafor, 1992: pp. 8-9; Nzewi, 1988: p. 8; Agawu, 1984: p. 53). Similarly, scholars,

composers and educators of Africa particularly, from the Nigerian extraction (Uzoigwe, 1992; Omojola, 1997; Nzewi, 1997; Nzewi, 1999a; etc.) have variously and in concert raised the concern and need for an African best practice for developing Africa-sensitive music education and creative model(s). In one of such observations, Okafor (1992) wrote:

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 Nigeria from an outside culture (pp. 8-9).

His view is that curriculum content, methodology, and teaching approach, alienate students from their cultural background. Nzewi (1988) had earlier observed that learner's cultural background has been ignored in the approach to music education in Nigeria so far. Advocating for Africa-based music curriculum, Idolor (2005) 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" (p. 87). These views evoke Masoga's (2006) 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" (p. 48).

The curricular concerns of music educators largely apply to most African countries that have passed through European colonial administration. Discussions of South African educational curricular provide further examples of the colonial impact on education (Potgieter, 2006; Potgieter & Klopper, 2006; Smit, 2006; Bosman, 2006; Selimovic, 2002, pp. 52-55). These scholars acknowledge the cultural backgrounds of learners as a crucial factor in music education in Africa in general. While latter day curricular of different levels of study in Nigeria have incorporated aspects of African music heritage and cultural contents, there is growing discomfort at the level of implementation, skill acquisition and methodological principles pursued for the development of the African component.

The Bi-cultural basis of university/teacher education curricular (Ekwueme, 2004, p. 155) provides for balanced musicality of music trainers but the reality of

the discipline presents constant suppression of the African component and preference for Westernisation. Realising the strong roping of African musical processes with threads of European elements, Agawu (2005), argues, "it is clear, however, that intellectual or artistic production by contemporary artistes and composers cannot by-pass the European legacy,..." (18).

However, this legacy does not entail perpetual seeing and perceiving with Eurocentric lenses; thinking and creating with and from Western parameters; structuring educational contents and methodologies entirely from the standpoint of Western indices of educational curriculum; and possessing skills exclusively on Western musical instruments and performance techniques against those of Africa. I suppose there exists the leverage for practical and theoretical structures rooted significantly in African indigenous musical practice and creativity, enabling Africa to pursue a new trajectory in music education and skill acquisition. The Bi-cultural basis of university music education captured by the National Universities Commission in the approved minimum academic standards for Bachelor of Arts in Music, states the objectives as follows:

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

Available evidence shows lack or non-existence of educational model and firm development of learners in skill acquisition on indigenous techniques, creative norms and theoretical cum philosophical underpinnings of African music practice and creativity and cultural studies.

Let me quickly add that on the one hand, the theme for this conference underlines a growing perception of the need for paradigm shift from the prescribed and entrenched Western educational processes perpetuated by the trained music educators in Nigeria up till now, to new Africa-derived processes evolved and cultivated from the creative components of Africa and which address and align

with the cultural, social, human and aesthetic principles of musical arts and ideologies of creativity, performance and education of Africans. On the other hand, the theme raises a critical issue of relevance, questioning the outcomes, hegemony and direction of the existing educational contents and methods. Whatever the case might be, there is an increasing yearning and desire for ownership of the educational content and processes by Africa. By the discourses that would take place, Nigerian educators are simply lending their voices in endorsing and stimulating new paradigms set from Nigeria and indeed Africa, to generate new debates and conversations centered on appropriate contents, values, aesthetics, processes, focus and goals of music education emanating from the cultural, social and humanistic ideals of Africa's musico-creative heritage. A platform of freedom for interrogation, appraisal and critical investigations would be constructed to determine how the continent has fared so far and present convincing evidence and references as well as problematize the need for a new trajectory from an uncharted terrain based on Africa-sensed music education model. Noteworthy is that the broader perspectives of Africa-sensed studies in modern Africa is not limited to music education alone. The quest is also mainstreamed in Ethnomusicology and African musicology. Thus, Mapaya and Mugovhani (2019) have argued that,

Although ethnomusicology has done the study of African music some good, it has seen its centrality to the study of African music wane. In its place a better, more focused and Africa-sensed mode of enquiry is required. Such a mode of enquiry should enthrone African doxa, ontologies and epistemologies as viable academic imperatives. (Pp. 29)

The aggregate of these conversations and arguments puts Africa at an advantage, endorsing the search for a new Africa that ultimately defines itself from its fidelity while rejecting prescriptions from the outside.

Contextualizing and Understanding the Term 'Africa-Sensed'

Meki Nzewi is largely associated with the term 'Africa-sensed' in the Nigerian context. In his latter/recent writings, the term is copiously used to argue for a sublime place for Africa's musical and cultural heritage. Answering questions in a

recently published interview, he says “I have resolutely carried the ancestral mandate of propagating Africa-sensed scholarship, creativity and advancement practice ever since”. (Onyeji and Onyeji, 2018: 133) Championing the course of equal recognition and respect for the musics of Africa and the world cultures, Meki’s strong and insistent pursuit of educational, creative, scholastic, technological and performative relevance of Africa in the global music milieu informed the choice of the term as he used and applied it.

However, my investigations have shown that some other scholars proposing adequate recognition of the rich cultural and creative heritage of Africa have used the term in different forms such as ‘Africa-sensitive’ or ‘African-centered’. Jacqueline Djedje (2003), noted that “although some in global culture may attempt to belittle African contributions by denigrating or disrespecting anything that represents African-centered perspectives, these same people look to Africa for musical and spiritual inspiration”. (vii) Speaking about a publication on African music, she also noted that “a publication that provides an Africa-sensitive perspective is encouraging”. (ibid) Discoursing the same book on African music, Einar Solbu (2003), says

this publication on Africa-sensitive musical arts education deals not only with music and musical arts education, but also with basic democratic rights. It deals with the responsibility one generation has toward the next. It deals with the relationships between a cultural past and a cultural future. It deals with people living together-in local communities and in the global world. Africa-sensitive Musical Arts Education deals with all of the above, because that is what musical arts education is about. (viii)

Elsewhere, I have also argued that “the question of deliberate development of Africa-sensitive content and structure of musical arts education has been an issue since the latter part of 20th century”. (Onyeji, 2017: 1). These writings endorse and take a position for the stimulation or motivation of Africaness or Africanity in the musical and educational processes of Africa in general. Africa-sensed, Africa-sensitive and African-centered, to me, are mutually interrelated ideologies or should I say Variants of the same idea. The choice for this discourse is ‘Africa-sensed’, which is central to the presentation.

Fitting many facets and specializations in music, the term 'Africa-sensed' is heavily loaded. The expression ultimately draws attention to, redirects, coerces and critically points at new paradigms for engagements from the African standpoint. It prioritizes Africanity, Africaness and Africa in music practice, creativity, education, etc. 'Africa-sensed' stimulates identity, negotiating and processing distinctive features of Africa's musical heritage in various perspectives of music. It enforces and re-enforces the search for the unique identity that stands Africa out in the world cultures while harnessing the great potentials that lie within. It readily recognizes the creative, content and methodological values and strengths of Africa hitherto ignored in favour of Eurocentric versions. On a deeper reflection, it coerces a sense of 'ourness' and attempts to underline, if not insist on our sense of musical pride, cultural distinction, aesthetic values, musicality, performance, creative genius and overall notion of sense of worth. In a sense, it emphasizes a duality in the current scheme, placing and recognizing music art and its methods as African and as non-African. While not ignoring the 'otherness' that exists, 'Africa-sensed' seeks to construct a platform for equal negotiation, recognition and respect between Africa and other musical cultures. 'Africa-sensed' is a complex concept that insists on being sensitive to African ideals and making sense from African ideals at the same time.

'Africa-sensed' simply argues for Africa, teaches Africa, utilizes Africa, and creates Africa for the inherent benefits. It is a balance negotiated from within, seeking to incorporate relevant elements from the outside. It seeks originality, authenticity, relevance, and true Africanity while rejecting 'second-hand' values. Seeking the prototypical quality, 'Africa-sensed' seems to me a deliberate search for African ideals as credible options in the teaching and learning of music in Africa for ultimate identity in the global music context. It is the realization of the fundamental duty to develop the sublime creative norms of Africa as against the continuous gobbling of imported and 'second hand' cultural patterns prescribed and shaped by the West. Overall, it is a form of de-colonization, re-conceptualisation, mental and human freedom, musical reconstruction, reconfiguration and self-realization for Nigeria and Africa.

Although one may be tempted to believe or see it as a brazen call for revolution, rebellion or resistance against established and cultivated 'Western-

sensed' musical, educational and methodological norms and values, it is rather a pursuit that endorses plurality of perspectives, and promotes as well as enhances variety of platforms for progress and development of music and its education from within Africa. It simply re-Packages music and music education from the standpoint of Africa, utilizing the principles, materials and creative essence of Africa.

The Reality of Africa-Sensed Music Education in Nigeria so far

Attempts at Africanization or Africa-sensed music education have been on since the introduction of Western formal music education in Nigeria. On a broader perspective, it is possible to argue that the very first attempt at providing Western formal music education to Africans or, in this case, Nigerians, was the beginning of the process of Africanization. Bringing in African/Nigerian flare, attitudes, nature and expertise into the general instruction naturally gives the whole process an African colouration, sensitive to African norms and values. All other attempts over the decades are, to my mind, refinements of the process leading to greater application and utilization of techniques and elements of Africa's heritage in the development of unique skills for proper indigenization of the process of music education in Nigeria. However, the problem seems to be the level of incorporation of Africanity and the implementation since the introduction of Western formal music education. I dare argue also that there appears to be confusion as to what constitutes 'Africa-sensed' in Nigerian music education at the moment.

The curricular provisions for music, starting with the first indigenous department of music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, present clear bi-cultural stand for training in African and Western music techniques. Curricular evolution at Nsukka, for instance, culminated in the 1991 edition that spelt out the study and specialization on one Western and one African musical instrument as major or minor instrument. Thus, the curriculum allows a student to specialize on an African musical instrument and be examined on it. This is in addition to all other African music courses a student must study. One significant addition is the performance workshop programme that also specified the study and performance of indigenous musical forms.

The attempt to implement/enforce some of the curricular provisions met stiff resistance from some Euro-centric experts that raised issues of standardization,

evaluation methods, issues of objectivity, notation, non-existence of written music, international application and lack of expertise of the opposing group on the instruments. Expectedly, the two students that opted to play Ese tuned drums as their major instruments at that time almost did not graduate due to frustrating bickering and issues that arose in the course of their practical examinations. Without any evidence, it was argued that opting for such instruments was a sure sign of laziness and lack of skills on “more serious” musical instruments. Problems arising from this initial attempt constrained poor attitude that ultimately killed the process in the department. From then on, students have not had the courage to take up African musical instruments for specialization. The Nsukka experience, I believe, replicated itself in other institutions, making it difficult to have graduates of music with skill and specialization on Nigerian musical instruments.

The narrative above provides a clear sense of instructional direction for music in Nigeria at the moment. Instructional principles and values have been disproportionately rooted in Western techniques to the point that lip-service is paid to Africanization of educational processes in Nigeria. According to Lundquist (1998) ‘the processes of instruction and learning are interconnected with the musical tradition’. (43) With the music educational content tilted in favour of Western music, the process of instruction has been Western. Similarly, Africa-sensitive/sensed musical learning implies development of congruent instructional and learning processes. Polarization of ideologies by experts with one group pursuing Western instructional principles while the other believes in Africa-sensed music education, is quite problematic, and may delay the achievement of new paradigms, given the tendency for each group to work at cross-purposes, leaving behind a sense of anarchy which would impact negatively more than it would enhance the process. The imbalance in the above polarization has left behind in its wake a group aptly described by Nzewi (1997) as aping Western masters who are neither grounded in the Western techniques nor are they grounded in indigenous techniques. The second group is made up of those who have genuine interest to learn, develop and propagate indigenous values and techniques, who constantly encounter the challenges of overcoming the stumbling blocks posed by the other group. Either way, with constant conversations on the subject of Africa-sensed music education, with stimulating discourses and evidence, arguing the benefits, progressive result would be achieved overtime.

Achieving Africa-Sensed Music Education in Nigeria

Achieving Africa-sensed music education in Nigeria entails or indeed mandates (a) new paradigm(s) in educational contents and methods for music. With several Nigerian writers raising concerns regarding the status quo, as already argued at the beginning of this presentation, the significant questions then are how do we achieve and what would be the exact form, model, design and overall distinction and direction of the new and desired Africa-sensed music education? Whose responsibility is it to put the structure in place? At what level should it start? Are we going to do away with the existing music education format? The pursuit thus stimulates plurality of questions and also raises some concerns on its own. Some of the concerns border on the capacity of the existing music educators to achieve the desired paradigm shift within the desired time and how many people are actually equipped to take on the challenge now? Another concern could be why we need a new model when many people think we are already doing well within the scope of international art music model in existence? The concerns and issues seem endless but the main arguments could be why do we have to operate on a platform fairly alien to the culture and practice of Africa/Nigeria? Must we constantly educate our generations based on and using the tools prescribed from the outside, even when other cultures of the world are significantly developing theirs based on their cultural and humanistic distinctions? Indeed, why can't Africa be creatively and methodologically different, independent, and unique through the educational processes in music? The biggest question to me is, was Africa not educating the generations musically before the encounter with the West? If the answer is in the affirmative, then we have residual models and processes that can inform the music education structure in Nigeria and the rest of Africa.

While accepting that the switchover entails some huddles, it at the same time stimulates new thinking and passion for ownership of Africa's music educational paradigms. It also supports social and creative relevance of Africa in the globalised world. Such new paradigms and the educational outcomes would provide new platforms for the redefinition, re-appraisal and re-presentation of Africa as a relevant stakeholder in global music and the education. A shared view insists that to achieve Africa-sensed music education in Nigeria, music educators must develop strategies to draw from the totality of indigenous music practices, creativity and spirit for pedagogical processes in music. Nzewi and Omolo (2014) argued that

African music scholars are currently grappling with the challenges of refocusing musical arts based on indigenous knowledge for classroom practice as well as developing Africa-sensed musical arts curricula that use culturally appropriate pedagogies derived from viable theoretical, philosophical and performance practices of indigenous music. The African spirit of humanity encourages all-inclusive participation that bonds participants in performance-based learning situations. The philosophy framing an assessment model should derive from the ideology of humanity (grounded in humane qualities and aspirations) embedded in musical arts education indigenous to the area of a culture. This model should enable and acknowledge demonstration of differentiated innate attributes and take into account the compatible skills of every participant in the learning activity.

Answering an interview question on the possible means of achieving Africa-sensed music education in Nigeria, Nzewi argues that,

Africa-sensed music education must discern the conceptual, philosophical, creative and performative dynamics of indigenous musical arts, which functioned as effectual agency for engendering mind and body wellness as well as salubrious societal polity operations. It will then adopt and advance the contents and pedagogical principles of performative assimilation of knowledge to generate creative disposition, fellow humanity conscience and consciousness also enriched spiritually in classroom learners as in tradition. (Thursday 21st March, 2019)

Nzewi's submission is unequivocal on the fidelity of in-depth study and understanding of the ramifications and essence of indigenous musical arts as resource for the construction and structuring of Africa-sensed model curriculum and pedagogical processes for music in order to achieve the sublime purpose and creative intentions of music from the stand-point of African practice and creativity. Downplaying the abstractness of certain art music types, the essence tilts on the human-centered prospects of music in indigenous Nigerian societies. Thus, the Community of Music Educators (CoME) and the Community of Music Makers

(CoMM) in Nigeria must engage in new conversations on a new trajectory for the philosophy and practice of music and the education to develop new and congruent skills through new contents and education methodology. A simple approach could be to assemble all known ethnographic and musicological studies on Nigerian indigenous music to sieve out relevant principles and pedagogical materials for curriculum development. The most significant part however, is to set up a body of informed scholars to engage in critical study of the materials to present the humanistic and deep-level human, creative and social underpinnings of such music texts which will form the core philosophical basis for their pedagogical use. This also presupposes a critical engagement to structure the contents according to levels of study as well as the relevant tasks for each level. Indeed, the resources for Africa-sensed music education have always been with us. The task is to harness them into structured pedagogical materials. Nigerian curriculum experts and planners have their noble task already mapped for them in the new educational structure.

Evidence¹

Perspectives on the application of Africa-sensed music education must be holistic. An integrated approach is prescribed to enable all-round achievement of the purpose. For that singular reason I acknowledge various perspectives such as educational, performance, compositional, historical, technological, philosophical, etc. The example below demonstrates a possible application of indigenous material in a composition teaching and learning situation drawn from an indigenous music. In such instances,

successful exploration of selected indigenous resources forms the foundation on which some creative activities could be undertaken. These could be melody writing, harmonic exploration and incorporations, rhythmic compositions; composing in phrases, sentences, sections, explorations of creative dynamics prevalent in a musical tradition or type, etc, in imitation of identified models (Onyeji 2017: 9).

¹ This section of the paper was drawn from one of my published works. See Onyeji, 2017.

A simple musical material from the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria is used below to highlight possible creative approach arising from musicological study of it, pointing to creative activities that learners can engage in.

Score

Oku Ngwo

Traditional

Andante ♩ = 60

Soprano

Mgb'o ku'n gwo n'a ga nan gwo o bi n'a to y'u to.

Mgb'o ri go ro n'e lu ya o da be re n'a kwa ya kpon chi ki kpon chi ki

o bi n'a to y'u to. kpon chi ki kpon chi ki. o bi n'a to y'u to.

Example 1. Sample melody for musicological study and application in composition.

Learners' study of this song would reveal to them some features such as those highlighted. A identifies the contour of the first section of the song which rises from a depth and falls back to the tonic while B shows the perfect cadence. C points at the imperfect cadence while D is a pattern that is repeated in the last sentence as in the first sentence of the song. E is a very good example of tonic chord in arpeggio form. This melody bears evidence of judicious mixture of conjunct and disjunct motions, balanced phrases, appropriate mood for the message of the text, onomatopoeia in D and E for the tapping sound on the palm tree, etc. The form and voice leading are also clear in the song that students could draw from its idiom for creative exercises in class.

Using this model, learners could engage with writing phrases, complete sentences, melodies or songs based on the idioms and features identified.

Progressively, they could be asked to compose melodies of 16 measures or more based on the model. The possibilities seem limitless and these allow a teacher to motivate the learners not only to know that all indigenous musical materials are potential creative resource but could also practically engage with them after transcribing and studying them for composition purposes. Arrangements of songs and choral works could develop from such exercises as well as piano accompaniments. Critical to such composition activities is clear grasp of the musicological features and idioms of the indigenous resource before their application.

In demonstrating a possible application of the example above in a musical (melodic) composition in the classroom with students, the argument that the idea is not to replicate tradition (Nzewi, 1997) but to employ the idioms of given indigenous musical examples in musical works must be applied. The musicological study of the melody above furnishes us with features that could be employed in new forms in melody writing, for instance. It is also relevant to note that not all the features may be employed in a given melodic writing at the same time. Thus, the demonstration below is just one out of many possibilities that could be generated from a class exercise with learners. This serves as a guide.

The image displays a musical score for a sample composition in 4/8 time, consisting of three staves. The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, with a double bar line at the end. The second staff starts at measure 5 and ends at measure 7. The third staff starts at measure 8 and ends at measure 10. Six specific melodic features are identified with brackets and labels: Feature A (measures 1-2), Feature B (measures 1-4), Feature C (measures 2-3), Feature D (measures 3-4), Feature E (measures 6-7), and Feature F (measures 8-10). Measure numbers 5 and 8 are indicated at the beginning of their respective staves.

Example 2: Sample composition arising from the study and use of a given folk melody

The folk melody started with a kind of tonic chord in broken form, rising from the root to the 5th. The new melody takes an inversion of that same chord in a new key in A and moves in an undulating contour in B, settling on the 3rd of the tonic chord as a cadential note in C. This is repeated as in the folk song. The cadential pattern in the first part of the melody becomes the identifying figure for this melody as it comes back at almost all the endings. This feature is evident in the folk tune. The middle section of the melody (D) imitates the rising feature of the middle section of the folk song also, hitting a top tonic note in a form of climax before receding with the opening line into an anacrusis (E) on the opening line to end the section. The melody ends with a repetition of the last measure of the first line of the song, in imitation of the folk melody, as a coda in F. Note that this ending could be cyclically repeated and developed to other melodic and musical materials. In essence, the new melody employed some features of the folk tune re-inventing them to suit the new composition. The middle section of the melody (D) employed a sequence that enhanced the creative and aesthetic features of the melody. Text is not added, as this could be drawn from any language. The interest is on the melody writing as an exercise for students based on examples from their cultural background. As already stated, individual cultural features, musical structures, idioms and performance dynamics as well as the student's creative flare and interest combine to influence the creative output from the composition exercise employing this procedure.

While developing new sets of curricular, Africa or Nigeria must develop new sets of musical concepts, terminologies, vocabularies, art and science of formal music, harmony and chordal system, musical instrument techniques and notations, aesthetics and interpretation of music and modes of music education while adopting relevant Western patterns as supporting materials.

Conclusions

Global identity politics is constructed on relevance and competence for value and acceptance. Relevance and competence based on acceptable and identifiable contributions leaning on unique cum sublime qualities. Cultural distinctions promote uniqueness. Africa's cultural and creative distinctions and genius remain untapped in the educational processes, denying Africa the weapon for essence and relevance as well as the competitive platform with other cultures in the global space. Africa's distinctive creative value, quality and essence position the

continent above others but are largely untapped. Drawing from Africa's rich cultural heritage for educational content and methodology would not only enable the achievement of Africa-sensed music education goals but would ultimately set new paradigms and relevance for the continent in the global music space through the unique pedagogical structures and methods. The question however is, are we willing to take up a new trajectory in Nigeria's music education?

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Interview

Interview with Meki Nzewi, Thursday 21st March, 2019.