

# **REPOSITIONING NIGERIAN MUSIC EDUCATION THROUGH STUDIES ON NIGERIAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

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## **Introduction**

Studies on African Musical instruments and development of music education have been undertaken since the early sixties (post-independence); including specific studies of African musical instruments in direct relationship with the development of music education in Nigeria by Echezona, Euba, Nzewi, Omibiyi, Okafor, Vidal, Agu, Adedeji, Chukwu, Ekeoba, Okunade, Olorunsogo, Uche, Olaniyan, Mokwunyei and many more. Although recommendations have been made and experimented upon especially at the tertiary level, the formal music education curriculum in most African countries including Nigeria is yet being debated with a yearning not only for more prominent attention but also to include and reflect adequate local content that ensures its validity. With a desire to evolve from where we were to where we should be, the thrust of this paper is that what constitutes implements of the normal ways of life of the people is here being considered relevant as vital tools for the development of music education in Nigeria.

The paper specifically explores useful strategies for more critical studies of African musical instruments in our ethnic areas, as our contribution to knowledge and music education in Nigeria. Data for this paper derives from primary and secondary sources. An archetypal experiment in the University of Benin is highlighted while various research models were sourced. While the findings suggest that not enough attention is paid to African musical instruments at any level of music education in Nigeria, the result of the Benin experiment however ensures the relevance and use of Nigerian musical instruments as contribution to the development potential of Music Education.

## **The Future of Nigerian Music Education in the Right Hands**

In Nigeria, there are numerous associations of music professionals and music lovers notable amongst which are;

1. ANIM; Association of Nigerian Musicologists. (Formerly MSN Musicological Society of Nigeria)
2. MUSON: Musical Society of Nigeria
3. PASMAL: Pan African Society of Musical Arts Association
4. COMEN: Conference of Music Educators in Nigeria

The first impression is that of duplication and proliferation but music is such a vast subject universe, that upon closer examination it becomes evident that although they are all musical associations, their membership, statutes and functions are different and to a large extent peculiar to each of the organizations. As such while ANIM is open to all graduates of music; MUSON is a group that caters basically for music lovers to study, practice and appreciate classical music. PASMAL on the other hand is an interdisciplinary umbrella body for musical arts educators who may not be directly in the music discipline but are however interested or are artistically or otherwise linked to any aspect of music such as theatre; directing, staging, costume and make-up, management, administration, fine art, sociology, history languages and much more. COMEN is a congregation of Music Educators in Nigeria; presumably those who really teach music at all levels. Beyond these categories of music based associations are others with diverse interests but of all, it is perhaps COMEN that holds the key to the future of Music Education in Nigeria as members are individually and collectively, major stakeholders and operators of the music education sector.

What is being achieved by responding to the issue of musical instruments and the development of music education in Nigeria is another phase of the African evolution which if pursued to a logical conclusion would augur well for following generations for whom the study of music in Nigeria would have been repositioned. Besides, advocating for effective attention to African musical instruments in the music education process in Nigeria is in addition a laudable way of ensuring preservation of our culture.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to achieve the purpose of this paper the first step Nigerian music scholars must take is to look back like the paradoxical Ghanaian *Sankofa* bird that walks with its head turned backwards to see where it is coming from in order to

determine where it must go. It is certainly deducible that by interfering with, as well as altering the course of African history through deception, that privileged western modes of thoughts were superior and consequently denigrating our indigenous knowledge systems are responsible for recorded resultant inferiority complex. (Okagbue, 2008)

A peek into the last three decades is rife with acculturation and enculturation of foreign ideology and life styles in multiple spheres of Nigerian life including taste in music. This may have provoked Akoh's (2008:4) warning that "scholars should stop dissipating energy borrowing western ideas and experiments and forcing them on the people". As an alternative he joins others in suggesting that the most effective method of mass development is through a folk cultural approach where culture dictates and by which the people's aspirations and potentials are met.

*Africa needs to reconnect themselves to their cultural basis by understanding and updating the indigenous local knowledge systems and making them the bedrock or foundations of developmental policies and agendas while remaining open to influence from elsewhere. Okagbue: 2008.*

Like language, a good knowledge of one's mother tongue engenders better articulation and usage of a foreign language hence proficiency in one or two African musical instruments portends a fertile background for the study of any foreign musical instrument. Otherwise, the real African music will continue to elude us while we continue to dwell in elusive "arrested" (*didirin*) development of our ivory towers while the "uneducated musicians" "smile to the banks".

Happily this issue under discourse is an indication of our present mind set which concomitantly affirms the validity of the use of Nigerian musical instruments as viable tool for the development of music education in Nigeria. More so, all the founding fathers of African music education were unanimous in their use and recommendation of traditional pedagogy.

## **Development**

Development is a broad and nebulous word. To begin with, developed nations are notably those countries with an annual per capita income of more than

\$2,000. In such countries the standard of living is from our point of view usually so high to the extent that an office driver/cleaner lives in a well-furnished flat/house, affords to own and drive a car or two and can afford a standard living; including good food, even an annual vacations for the family and a musical instrument of their choice. The contrary is the developing situation of the third world under which Nigeria is classified with a vast population below \$2,000 income and consequently very poor standard of living for the generality of the people. There was never a barrier to music and musical instruments as they were owner-manufactured from available local materials.

Since development is not a natural process or endowment but a human induced experience, the way forward is to add more effort to actualization and implementation of strategies. (Akoh, 2008)

### **Development and Music Education in Nigeria**

Before colonization, Nigerians as now enjoyed various forms of traditional music, dance and instrumental music. As the country sought to find her feet after independence in 1960, new forms of music blossomed alongside a revolutionary pace of national development, in a bid to catch up with trends in modern civilization. The result of this revolution was a change in behavioural patterns, consequently reflected in music, as they occurred in various aspects and stages of the life of the Nigerian such as the birth of a child, naming of a child, age grading, marriage and death. (Mokwunyei, 2001). Most of these important traditional contexts (birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies) began to feature preferred alternatives.

These alternatives mostly from the popular music genre were foreign and imported until contemporary Nigerian popular musicians seized the initiative to explore and popularize elements of traditional African music in their music to a most welcome relief of the populace who were already disgruntled. Concurrently, the music Departments further alienated themselves with intensified studies in more western music until Ethnomusicology was introduced and as Okafor (2005) put it "a new music awareness set in".

The issues that resonated however, includes how to emphasize or at best blend this still new foreign type of music, with the generally accepted more popular type traditional African music that the continent is richly endowed with and still currently practiced as part of their cultural identity.

Nzewi (1996:23) affirmed that any human group that has a distinctive body of musical knowledge and practice passed on from one generation to the other, as does Africa has an operative system of music education. The question of how to transfer from the operative system of the informal to the formal sector remains work in progress. The current situation is that a music education curriculum that addresses our current concern for African musical instruments in Nigeria music education does not yet exist, hence some energy needs to be channeled to defining acceptable modalities and methodologies for our purpose, in line with the philosophy that;

*...the study of African music should be rooted in African environment, using universally locally accepted methods of scholarship in the field but modified to suit locally accepted concepts and criteria of the particular culture.*

*(Mokwunyei, 2011:175)*

Following in the footsteps of Nzewi who studied a traditional musical instrument for his PhD thesis, Sam Chukwu has not only published some books on the playing of drums but also fearlessly initiated an entirely new classification system in his PhD thesis worthy of scrutiny. We cannot therefore justify any claim of lack or insufficient research and study. What we have not done or done enough of however is deciding to create and give a desired status and attention to our local instruments as we do the western instruments in our curriculum and study as major instruments as well as prominence in extracurricular activities. Also, in-depth studies such as have been carried out on Ese drums are long overdue. More studies from various regions of the country should be encouraged to highlight the wealth and variety that have otherwise remained subdued.

More detailed studies and documentation on taxonomies, theories, construction, playing techniques and practices should be considered. These studies should be encouraged to specifically cover the individual scholars' own

indigenous locality for originality and authenticity. For instance earlier studies by some renowned musicologists had classified the *Aniocha Akpele* as a flute leading to several bandwagon duplication of this error in books and journals. However an in-depth study by this insider researcher proved the instrument to be a trumpet and not a flute. This was confirmed as you could check by playing the instrument with the flute playing technique by the researcher which did not produce a sound. Having procured an *Akpele* during the fieldwork, the researcher then experimented with a trumpeter far away from the source of the instrument where it did not exist. The instruction was to play this “strange instrument” with the trumpet blowing technique and it worked.

### **Circulation of Research Results**

Whereas much research has been carried out in various aspects of music education in Nigeria, the result of such research is usually not shared especially among scholars. To avoid repetition of already researched topics it is recommended that all new books and journals in music education should henceforth be acknowledged and launched at conferences. However such books should be scrutinized and competently edited for quality assurance. This is where academic mentorship plays a key role.

When a book is “forwarded” by a more experienced scholar, it is assumed that the content has been passed and is worthy of circulation. We may not all be publishers and indeed the gift of writing is not a mark of intelligence as we are told, “the race is not to the swift”. Writing is a gift which should be acclaimed as such. You may not have the talent for writing but may be a good reviewer/editor. On the other hand you may have the talent but may not be endowed with the fluency of the medium of writing. That is where cooperation and collaboration are required to be sought and given.

There should be a follow up on issues raised during conferences. For instance the communiqué after the last COMEN conference had called for some structural changes in the development of the new curriculum with a view to repositioning music appropriately as a required subject for the mental development of the child and not just an appendage in a cluster manifestation as currently

reflected in the Culture and Creative Arts (CCA) curriculum. It will be good to hear what became of that call during this conference? What became of that call?

A lot of work has been done through the involvement of some members including Dr. Sam Chukwu, Prof. Josephine Mokwunyei and others. Constant advocacy is necessary for follow up assessment and review of the music curriculum.

### **Formal and Informal Music Education**

Formal and informal music education coexist in contemporary African societies where informal music education is learnt, performed and transmitted orally from generation to generation among homogeneous groups in rural and urban communities and formal music is learnt in schools.

### **Informal Music Education**

Music comes naturally to the African because the informal traditional system provides for it through listening observation and participation. From listening to their mothers, by age 5, they have learnt the primary elements of festive dances where they are free, to attend, observe and participate. By six, they are able to dance with adolescents and sometimes on request to adults with accurate dexterity to the rhythmic dance patterns. About the same time, they begin to learn choral responses to the songs adults intersperse with folk tales told in the evenings, as well as join in hand-clapping rhythms that accompany such songs. (Mokwunyei, 2010)

The Nigerian child is thus prepared for more music education following a cultural induction within the tradition where children see musical instruments and on their own begin to take special interest to imitate those they like. Walking through a typical street in any part of Nigeria as I have in Ibadan and Benin, you may occasionally see a child with a self-made prototype musical instrument from various classifications including idiophones, chordophones but mainly membranophones. I have in my quest observed drums made out of discarded cylindrical tins as body of the drum and cellophane or paper to represent the membrane tops that they see on real drums. With their self-made pieces, these children practice African rhythms already imbibed from conception through birth, childhood and adolescence. (Mokwunyei, 2010)

## **Specialization**

These master instrumentalists who got their initial music education from tradition would benefit greatly from formal music education if available, to propel them to virtuosity but as Adedeji (2013) rightly asked; who will teach the local instruments? There is certainly need for training but we can start from somewhere as will be suggested later in this paper.

## **Formal Music Education**

Formal music education in Nigeria developed from teaching of singing (basically for use in church activities following colonialization) to teaching of rudiments and theory of western classical music to meet with requirements for performance of western musical instruments already acquired (imported). This type of music which is essentially classical is however restricted to a privileged few who are musically aware and therefore in a position to understand and appreciate it.

## **Attention to African Musical Instruments in Nigeria Music Education**

Certain philosophies are said to guide the method of induction into African music practice. For instance a learner is assigned the simple looking instrument. This is by no means demeaning as this simple looking instrument in the traditional setting plays the most demanding role of the ensemble which is the coordinating role that Nzewi (1996) refers to as the ensemble phrasing referent layer. Similarly the young son of a master drummer is first given the drum called Kannago, the smallest and easiest to play. (Mokwunyei, 2010).

By the time the young lad masters the instrument; his dexterity becomes undisputed as he is given the opportunity during major outings, to showcase his talent. Below is one such talent who thrilled the audience during the PasmaE conference in Badagry in 2009 as recorded in an earlier paper by (Mokwunyei, 2010).



For the first few years of his life the son of a master drummer is exposed to the same type of cultural experiences as any other child. While the children of a master musician may be at closer range to appreciate his father's special skill, other children are free to associate even at close range as allowed by communal existence. The result is that children from non-musical families sometimes end up as master instrumentalists, having freely submitted themselves to tutelage.



This is where we must also start our music education by encouraging our students to play Nigerian musical instruments of their choice, beginning with one or two simple ones either from their ethnic locality or from the locality of their educational institution.

### **Some Simple Portable Nigerian Musical Instruments**

Without attention to a preferred classification into four as recommended by Sachs/Hornbostel or the more recently referred to template by Vidal that include Lamelaphones, Chukwu's "Utiliphone" series, Lo-Bamijoko's *Iti, Iku, Ifu* and numerous other variations beyond the scope of this paper, there are many portable musical instruments that can be used as tools for individual experimentation and teaching aid as follows:

#### **Idiophones**

- Primary rattles: gourd rattles (*Isia*:Anicha Igbo, *Ichaka* : Igbo central, *Ukuse*:Edo)
- Secondary rattles: Anklets, "Wristlets", "Waistlets" and "Leglets"
- Struck idiophones: Bells, Clappers, Metal gongs
- Melodic idiophones: Thumb piano (*Ubo aka*:Igbo culture), Xylophone (*Ngedegwu*: Nsukka),

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- Wooden gongs: (Ekwe- Igbo)

### **Aerophones**

- Wooden flute (Oja in Eastern Igbo culture)

### **Chordophones**

- Goje (Northern Nigeria)

### **Membranophones**

- Membrane drums varieties: Dundun, Samba and Conga

### **Traditional and Contemporary Makeup of Instrumental Ensembles**

In grouping instruments for ensemble performance, cognizance should be taken of how they are grouped in their traditional ensembles, especially in the contemporary traditional ensembles with modified versions of what usually exists in traditional contexts. Okonkwo 2013 who informs that *Nkwa* music ensemble consists of two classes of instruments; Idiophones and membranophones, but principally of idiophone family presents the makeup of an *Nkwa* ensemble from the South East as follows:

- *Igba* (membrane drums) which are usually six in number with three on each side of the player and placed on a triangular stand in a horizontal position.
- *Ekwe* (Medium wooden slit drums). This set is four in number placed on a four-sided stand for a seated player. It is regarded as the master instrument.
- *Udu* (Pot drum). One pot drum that is generally the metronomic instrument and the bass background that gives firm support to the music.
- *Alo* (the big, long bell) is one that provides rhythmic interjections.
- *Ichaka* (Shakers) usually has four players who play in rhythmic unison.

- *Ogenephone* (a number of bells stuck together on a bar of iron also called metalophone) in different sizes and tones with one player.
- *Okpokolo* (small slit wooden drum without membrane) is one played as a metronome marker.

While local ensembles should be encouraged from the environment of the institution, other ensembles emanating from individual research of other regions of the country should also be encouraged.

### **Gender issues and taboos**

We cannot deal conclusively with this theme without consideration for gender issues as it matters variously in the cultural and contemporary contexts of Nigeria. The general picture in most mixed social groups is that males play the bigger and more complex musical instruments such as the giant *Ikoro* or *Ekwe* (wooden gongs) of Southern Ibos of the Eastern Nigeria, *Bata* (Yoruba drums) in Western Nigeria and *Akpele* (gourd trumpets) of Anioma group of South Western Nigeria.

If African musical instruments are to assume their proper place in the development of music education in Nigeria then a closer look needs to be taken at gender issues and taboos in relation to prevailing practices, beliefs and restrictions of female children and adults. However the evidence of research concerns in this area is encouraging. For instance;

*...the taboos on touching talking drums that apply to all women appear to have eased considerably as females in Nigeria ... are seen to learn and play the talking drums with some female musician in Nigeria actually going a step further to specialize in playing the Yoruba talking drum. (Mokwunyei, 2010:443).*

At the University of Benin, a female student who had a vocal pitch problem but had a good sense of rhythm was encourage to play a talking drum for her special study rather than drop out of the music class for which she showed great interest

and zeal. She happily ended up with commendable skill that she took along to her new life after graduation.

### **The Way forward: Hands-on Methodology**

Beyond the theories of the subject matter is the hands-on methodology that prepares the student for the real world where white collar jobs are no longer a birthright but an exclusive preserve of the children of the privileged 20% or less of the entire populace. In other words, learning music is better done by handling musical instruments, listening to musical items of same as well as singing.

Theoretical descriptions and definitions should come only after an active experience has been cultivated. For instance, in teaching rhythmic notation, it is better to make learners enjoy the rhythmic structure in the phrasing like taa tate taa for a crotchet, 2 quavers and a crotchet clapped before they may be told what the claps represent theoretically. (Mokwunyei 2010:47).

### **Benin Experiment**

The current music programme in the University of Benin is under the umbrella of the Department of Theatre Arts later renamed Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication. While hoping that our struggle of over 20 years for independence will materialize soon, we will continue to make the best of the situation.

Although music is most crucial to theatre where musical instrumentation is needed to accompany and create requisite mood to start, end and within play productions, the current structure of the Theatre Arts curriculum does not do much justice to music education, hence the protracted clamor for a separate music programme and department to enable us plan music courses for more benefit.

\*At 100 level, there is a compulsory music course; Foundations of Music 1 and 2.

\*At 200 level is another music course; Applied Music.

\*No music course at the 300 level

\*At 400 level is Music Performance Techniques combined with Dance forms in a course entitled "Dance Forms and Music Performance Techniques". This is taught by both music and dance lecturers respectively.

Interestingly at the post graduate level the Master of Theatre Arts Degree programme offers 2 music courses including Twentieth Century Music and Organology. It is the organology course that provides the appropriate ambience for the study of African/ Nigerian musical instruments which has been effectively utilized.

Part of the requirement for this organology course at the 800 Master's level is a field study of any Nigerian musical instrument of their choice from the ethnic locality of the individual students. The individual choice is however scrutinized, approved and supervised by the lecturer in charge to ensure variety and viability of project. This has produced tremendous results with students with little or no formal music background. One such student who studied *Afan* an idiophone from Edo North eventually wrote his Master's thesis on "An Organological Study of *Afan*". He went on to further explore the instrument at Ph.D level in the US where he popularized the near extinct musical instrument with recordings and postings on the internet.

While it is not possible to convert all music courses to African Music, ensemble/ workshops courses should be created at all levels to provide for contact where practice of Nigerian musical instruments can be taught. This has been provided for in our proposed music programme.

The prevailing issues are both administrative and political but with the leadership of a development inclined and knowledgeable current Dean of Arts (Professor Ogo Ofuani), we are beginning to see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Africa has been severally recorded as being endowed with a variety of musical experiences with multi-ethnic peculiarities that encompass musical instrumental correlations. The current lack of practice is not for lack of popularity of the instruments or the cherished sound but rather for the absence of teachers. The few instrumentalists encountered in Edo and Delta are either very old or now passed on. In addition, there is no evidence or attempt of direct succession on the part of those musicians, to pass on their skills to a younger generation as is the

case with the *Yoruba* and *Akan* (of Ghana) musical families and drums traditions. (Mokwunyei, 2004).

An only exception to this general position was discovered while on the research in Nigeria. In Obomkpa, Emeka Anionicha was seen coaching some young enthusiasts on the Akpele playing technique. His number of students ranged from 7 to 10 as they were not all present at the same time all the times visited. Some were absent for different reasons ranging from health to routine labour for sustenance but certainly not lack of interest. At the time of initial contact over a decade ago, that was the only such "school" for practice of Akpele in the whole of Aniocha North. A follow up shows that there has been none since then. However while Emeka waxed stronger as tourist musician to service his large clientele at different functions, his trainees have been equipped to fill in the gap as required in the general Aniocha area.

## **Strategies**

In planning strategies for repositioning music education in Nigeria through Nigerian musical instruments, the following should be considered.

1. In answer to the question about who to teach local instruments, this paper strongly suggests that virtuoso players of Nigerian musical instruments such as "Emeka Anionicha" (of the Aniocha North study) and others from other cultures, whenever and wherever discovered in the country should be employed as instructors or artistes in residence in Music Departments to teach their special instruments in institutions located in their States of origin where their art is understandably most appreciated and regulated.
2. Due reference must be given to operative system in traditional culture.
3. Regional mappings: Well illustrated taxonomies in the 6 geopolitical regions; that specifies; inventory, description, standard and regional classification, preservation, conservation, protection, promotion, development and sustainability
4. Hands on methodology through instruments study and practice.
5. Construction and performance of African musical instruments as major instruments
6. Imminent revision with strategic incorporation of traditional musical instruments in curriculum of ever music department.

7. Lack of qualified personnel should be solved by systematic integration of local experts as artistes in residence in all institutions where there are no experts.
8. The few experts among us should be identified recognized and appropriately assigned
9. Vocational education and entrepreneurship in music technology should be encouraged with workshops built and equipped for mass production of Nigerian musical instruments for basic supplies and as source of revenue for departments of music.

All above strategies can be achieved in one fell swoop under purposeful curriculum guidance and implementation to prepare our youth for the real world.

### **Summary of Action Points for Departments of Music**

1. Attention to and acquisition of African musical instruments.
2. Construction / music technology workshops for Nigerian musical instruments.
3. Employment of master instrumentalists from traditional culture.
4. Encouragement of studies in African music
  - a. Regional studies
  - b. Taxonomy of existing ensembles.
  - c. Nigerian musical instrument as major/minor instrument.
5. Needs assessment and curriculum revision.
6. Systematization and compilation of relevant research results and texts.

Finally, this paper which recommends a follow up action by congress ends with words of wisdom from our elders to who Omibiyi-Obidike draws our attention for a reorientation to the reality of the African world. She particularly avers that their reaction is better summed up by Nketia (1998) when he reported his

encounter with Amu thus:

*Before leaving the assembly hall, he came by the harmonium and spoke to me. "Madamfo" ("my friend") [...] I gather you are interested in composition [...] Don't copy my music. Go and learn from the traditional musicians, for that is how I came to write my music" (Nketia, 1998:13).*

To our younger colleagues therefore, I say *oyim, eyim, oremi, olukumi*, do not copy the Onwuekwes, the Adedejis, the Onyejis and other second generation musicologists. Respect them and each other but go and study the traditional music and instruments of your ethnic locality as a basis for your composition and musicianship.

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