

COMPOSITIONAL PRACTICE IN NIGERIAN MUSIC EDUCATION: EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction

The predominant emphasis on the study of European music, which obtains in the Nigerian music curricula at the moment, is untenable. While the study of European music in Nigerian schools and universities should not be completely discouraged - given the enormous impact of European culture on different aspects of Nigerian society - the development of an academic and educational system which addresses itself to the artistic and economic needs of contemporary Nigeria should be the dominant objective of any music curriculum in the country. One of the ways through which this objective can be met is by examining the Nigerian society, the music industry, and contents of the music curriculum in the university.

In the examination of the contents of curriculum from primary, secondary to tertiary levels of education, a lot of issues regarding contents and relevance to modern society have been raised (cf. Ekwueme 2000, Omibiyi-Obidike, 2001, Olusoji, 2013, etc.). Other scholars have raised challenges bordering on a balance between the Western and African content in the bi-musical curriculum of the Nigerian universities (cf. Okafor 2005; Adeogun 2006; Faseun 2008; and many more.). Apart from the universities, Ogunrinade's (2013) study on Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) reveals that the curriculum impacts little or no learning of Nigerian music to the learners. While most of these studies have been advanced on the general content of the curriculum, the present assessment effort is geared towards the specifics – focusing on theory and composition as an area of specialization within the university undergraduate music curriculum. Also, this

paper argues that issues bordering on curricula and their contents have been unresolved for years; hence, other emerging issues have continued to evolve.

Theory and composition as an area of specialization is the bedrock area of specialty and advances the music-making process. A school of thought sees other areas of study in music deriving their basis from composition. This set of scholars equates music with composition, their definition of music simply implying composition and vice versa. Ultimately, education in music presupposes the conglomeration of music(s) for study. The notion of music in this context is musical creativity; composition in this sense covers both the content of theory and practice of composition in the undergraduate programme. The focal point in this paper is on content analysis before the discussion on emerging issues and gap between the Nigerian music education and the Nigerian music industry vis-a-vis the Nigerian contemporary society. The central question is on “how does the content of the music curriculum reflect the dynamism of the society?”

Theoretical Framework

An integrated theoretical framework for cross-cultural human development proposed by Dasen (2003) cited in Dasen (2011) is adopted for this study. This framework states that an integrated system which recognizes a combination of various frameworks encountered over the years and found useful in a variety of contexts should be adopted in the development strategy for the training of a child. The main focus of the framework is the development of an individual child, with a particular set of inherited and acquired dispositions. Surrounding the child is the micro-context in which development occurs, also called the “developmental niche.” By implication, the integrated system is not a set of theoretical rules but a continuous exploration of the dynamism within the society in the teaching and learning mechanism towards the development of the child. Musical art education within the Nigerian society is apposite to this model. Explaining the developmental niche, Dasen identifies three components:

1. The settings, or physical and social contexts in which the child lives,
 2. The customs, or culturally-determined rearing and educational practices, and
 3. The social representations or parental “ethno-theories” of child development.
- These are the guardians or other caretakers, or indeed all adults, who have some sort of what they consider to be important in the development of their children.

In this paper, the interpretation of an integrated system of musical development is considered from the content analysis of the undergraduate programme. The purview of the developmental niche consists of three dimensions that contribute immensely to the development of the learner. Dasen (2003) sees the developmental niche as a system in which the component parts interact and function in coordinated fashion. Judging from the general notion, how has the music that make up the Nigerian setting (religious or social), including culturally-determined upbringing, form part of the classroom curriculum? Typically, as Dasen explicates, there is consonance among the elements of the niche, especially under conditions of stability in the society (pre-colonial), but sometimes there are also inconsistencies, especially under the impact of social change and acculturation.

Moreover, the integrated system is an open system where each component is linked with other aspects of the more general environment and enhances functional learning. In the case of music, a functional education takes place when the diversities and complex phenomena of the musical environment are linked. Interestingly, it is music education that is saddled with the responsibility of creating the required links between the conditions of stability and the impact of acculturation in the society. It is the role of the music educator to synergize with other cognate areas and provide adequate interpretation for the content of the curriculum. Perhaps their utmost interest should be in the processes of cultural transmission, notably enculturation and socialization and how these are factored into the interpretation. In this paper, attempt is made on how we could redefine music education, not only as schooling in music but as the totality of cultural transmission in music. The integrated framework is applied to emphasize the need to allow learners experience music in its holistic form, especially from the background that every learner comes to the university with some level of knowledge of music (all things being equal).

Theory and Composition in the Undergraduate Programme

The programme from the Students' Handbook of some Departments of Music mirrors four (4) areas of study;

- (a) Theory of Music
- (b) History, Form and Literature of Western Music,
- (c) African Music, and

(d) Practical Musicianship.

These represent five (5) areas of specialization:

- (i) Theory and Composition,
- (ii) Performance,
- (iii) African Music/Musicology,
- (iv) Music Education, and
- (v) Music Technology.

The inclusion of music technology in the area of specialization but not in the area of study betrays the motive as five areas of specialization are listed in BMAS. Considering world practices on music technology, how much of that have been introduced into the curriculum to impact learning.

Generally, the curriculum as designed for the undergraduate programme is replete with two levels of challenges, namely

- the sum total of courses that propagate Western music compared to the sum total of courses representing African music;
- The inability of the courses to represent the totality of musical practice within the society.

Popular music that epitomizes popular cultures are of interest to the youths and had been grossly neglected on the list of courses of study in some Departments of Music. Before we return to these salient issues on the content of curriculum, we should consider other issues within the educational system beginning with policies and benchmarks.

Music Education in the University and National University Benchmark

It is essential at this point to undertake this study from the background of minimum standard of university education in Nigeria. According to NUC Benchmark (BMAS) (FGN 2007 p. 144) for the university, the aims and objectives of the programme leading to B.A. degree in Music include:

- a). To prepare and produce graduates of music who will be competent to musicianship both in the international sense and also in their own African and

National tradition. Graduates must have an understanding of the Arts and Science of Music as tools for the appreciation, analysis and practice of world music.

- b). To develop creative skills and talents in students with a view to preparing them for self-employment and entrepreneurship in music industry, broadcasting, communications, entertainment, film cinematography and allied professions.
- c). To lay a foundation for further studies at post-graduate levels leading to advanced engagements in music research laboratory studio and functional exploration of music in relevant organizations and institutions such as Museums, Arts Councils, Religious, Teaching/Pedagogy and Mass Communication Media etc.
- d). To prepare and produce graduates of Music with an understanding of the art and science of Music and tools for the appreciation, analysis and practice of world (Western European) Music and African Music, and an ability to communicate these principles to others.
- e). To prepare students for professions in the practice and/or teaching of Music at various levels of education, broadcasting, media houses and other avenues of private and public music use, and in entertainment (FGN, 2007, p. 144).

In summary, the benchmark identifies the following: the appreciation, analysis and practice of world music; to develop creative skills and talents; lay a foundation for further studies at post-graduate levels leading to advanced engagements in music research; an ability to communicate these principles to others; and to prepare students for professions in the practice and/or teaching of Music at various levels of education.

In the context of this paper, items (c) and (e) cover educational goals, while the other three (a), (b), and (d) epitomize compositional practice goals. Compositional practice here includes performance. Performance is conceived principally as the interpretation of a composition. Obviously, musical creativity provides grounds for other aspects or areas of specialization.

The point of convergence regarding the issues on compositional practice and educational goals in this paper is the notion of developing “creative skills and talents in students with a view to preparing them for self-employment and

entrepreneurship in music industry, broadcasting, communications, entertainment, film cinematography and allied professions” and “... functional exploration of music in relevant organizations and institutions such as Museums, Arts Councils, Religious, Teaching/Pedagogy and Mass Communication Media, etc.” (Ibid). The question is simple: To what extent has the undergraduate programme address these aims and objectives? Obviously, there seems to be imbalance in the curriculum. Also, where necessary, a few course descriptions are, usually, presented to guide elicitation and discussions on issues and challenges. Evidently, several issues and challenges have emerged that need urgent attention and intervention.

Analysis of Course Descriptions and Discussions

Firstly we should assess the reality on precipitating issues that should arouse our curiosity in this paper which precincts on the relevance of the study of music today, if it does not mirror the practices within the society. Presumably, practices in music, the arts, and education must meet the demands and needs of the world we live in, in ways that are practical, meaningful, and relevant. Banfield (2015) suggests that “Artists [composers] must continually bring their professional experience to meet the new challenges in music, the arts, performance, and education”. He went on to raise an important question: “What would a holistic approach to teaching, creating, exploring, exchanging, and performing that unified music and the arts look like, especially if it were sustainable beyond mere market penetration?”(p. 4). These questions present the major issues of our music education that needs urgent attention.

Secondly, there is a vital part of musical education that has not been the focus of scholarship for decades: Music Business. The omission of vital part has created issues including some arising from the import of the self-employment and entrepreneurship in music already mentioned in the (b) section of the BMAS’ aims and objectives. Perceptibly, the Nigerian education system is programmed towards passing examinations and awarding certificates. The challenge with this kind of system especially in third world countries is the promotion of underdevelopment. For instance, most graduates of music seek paid employment with their certificates when they could have been self-employed or start small business. Obviously, educational training they received tended towards paid

employment. The absence of music entrepreneurship in the curriculum is anomalous in the recent realities and economy.

Many scholars in recent times have questioned the unchanging content of the University curriculum despite the diversities and acculturation in the society. Among them, Nwankwo (2014) for example, argues that Musical arts in Nigeria and its study should reflect Nigerian contents. He observes that “The primary aims of Nigerian graduates of music (especially from Nigerian universities) should be to employ their knowledge in seeking solutions to musical problems in Nigeria. Therefore, the music curriculum should embody relevant courses for that purpose”. Questioning the UNN’s curriculum, Nwankwo rhetorically notes ‘after studying fugue in the university, what next?’ Music curriculum planners need to answer this question before including fugue as a compulsory course for all music students in the next curriculum review. In this context, fugue should not be totally expunged from the curriculum, rather, it should be made compulsory only for students majoring in composition, piano, and organ and then left as an elective course for other students. This, no doubt, would improve its teaching and understanding because the class will be a class for specialists. Although Nwankwo’s submission is strong and supported, alternatively, because of the need to accommodate other areas in the curriculum, Fugue should be left as part of the content of Analysis of Tonal Music. Many courses like this should be discarded or made elective for relevant courses to be included in the curriculum.

From another perspective, Idamoyibo (2015) criticizes the Nigerian system especially in the university, where educational developments are devoid of the realities in cultural and religious systems, as well as socio-political systems and commercial structures. His criticism is based on assessment of the minimum standards of music programmes for Nigerian Universities as specified by the National University Commission (NUC) and the analysis of standards of the actual music programmes currently running in selected Nigerian Universities including University of Uyo.

The Nigerian music scene is characterized by three basic practices: traditional, popular and art music. However, popular music dominates the other two. Paradoxically, the curricula of some of the departments are prominent with

traditional and art music with distinct position given to popular music as an area of study. More complex musical practice is seen in the Nigerian Music industry. Even the borrowing of ethnomusicological studies into African musicology has been bedeviled with Euro-centric stance. What problem has the study of music in culture been able to solve remarkably since the 1950s? Some courses in African Music Theory emphasize notation and transcription. The major issue here is that African scholarship has not developed a standardized and generally acceptable notation to solve the problem of notation and transcription.

Some course descriptions are apt and do, adequately, cover specific areas and genres to highlight. However, some for composition are ambiguous and lacks focus. This might be the reason why some students do not know what to compose in Project Composition. Some course contents such as serialism and 12-tone, etc. have nothing to offer African musicology. It is, somehow, weird and absurd to see African composers struggle with these techniques to capture African identity and essence. Uzoigwe's *Ukom* and *Abigbo*, Onyeji's *Ufie* were composed using pentatonic tone-row but no music literature has promoted the concept. These are issues of concern that attention should be focused.

Popular music in Nigeria and the trends in Nigerian music industry cannot be neglected in the curriculum. Although this may be considered significant for those interpreting the curriculum, however, popular music in Nigerian should occupy a significant place in the curriculum. The interpreter, on the other hand, needs basic knowledge of an integrated system to offer relevant interpretation to any course description. Notably, the interpretation would be based on the background of the interpreter, be it Western, African or integrated. Popular music in this programme is negligible. Basing this argument on theory courses (TC), music creativity is limited to Western Art music and a sprinkling of tokenistic practices in African creative models as evident in African Pianism and drumming practices for the piano. The way forward is a comprehensive review that takes into account the integrated system.

Agu (2008) cited in Agu (2012) opines that "music is the expression of man's deepest self and that its effect can be tremendously profound only when its scholarship has attained certain elements of originality and nationality". He went a

step further to “emphasize the primacy of musical arts education and practice as a vital tool for perpetuating Nigerian cultures within the threshold of current global environment” (Ibid:2). This paper proposes a review of the content of the university curriculum if it must contribute to perpetuating the Nigerian culture within the global environment. Nigeria has so much musically to offer world music.

Emerging Issues and Challenges in the Nigerian Music Education

The issues and challenges that have emerged in the educational practice of Nigeria are highlighted here. The list is inexhaustible as each area of specialization has its own set of peculiar challenges to be addressed by keying into the opposite practices in such areas.

- (i) **Educated unemployment:** in this discussion refers to unemployment among the educated population. Bacchus (1981) noted that ‘relative to the working population as a whole, the unemployed as a group in some developing countries tend to be educated, especially where young and inexperienced unemployed are numerous’. Educated unemployment is a direct result of an increased graduate from educational institutions who largely lack the requisite skills to be self-reliant or get absorbed into the organized private sector. Higher education institutions produce, on annual basis, graduates in large numbers that do not have access to employment; principally because of the nature of education they receive (Bogoro, 2015, p. 4). Music education should not be affected by the anomalous situation; however, statistics show high level of educated unemployment in music. Accordingly, one of the aims and objectives of the university training enshrined in the BMAS is defeated.
- (ii) **Interpretive or interpretational musicology:** Musicology should be interpretive, in that, technical analysis, by itself, is insufficient as interpretation. African musicology cannot be critiqued on the bases of technical analysis, without recourse to context and many other extra-musical or meta-musical conjectures. Explicitly or implicitly, African musicology is lagging this posture in the curriculum. The mantra of ethnomusicological studies notwithstanding, African musicology must emphasize subjective experience, that is, the experience of cultivated, contemplative listeners. In whatever milieu, critics and the likes favour explicit evaluative commitments, based on experience. From the perspective of compositional practices, the central object of critics’

interpretive and evaluative work should be the individual composition. The musical repertory addressed by technical theory and analysis, because of the field's affiliation with academic composition, extended through modernism up to the present, engaging recent music that did not seem to interest the partisans of academic music criticism. But, for both analysis and criticism, as understood in the debates of the 1980s, the relevant music was firmly within art-music traditions. This implies that the Nigerian music industry and the Nigerian scene of musical practices covering traditional, popular, and allied practices should be integrated into art-music traditions.

- (iii) **Neglect of popular music:** For many years, popular music studies had existed with very little interaction with the musicology of classical music. Academic music programmes, powerful scholarly organizations and journals concentrated almost exclusively on cultivated European music and its international continuations. Beyond this, music programmes might have a marginalized place for ethnomusicology, itself also not typically concerned with popular music. This has changed, though gradually and incompletely; many music programmes now include scholars of popular music and grant Ph.D.s for popular music research. Musicological research on popular music has taken the forms of technical analysis, ethnography and historical research (*cf.* Maus, 2011, *Radical Musicology*). Yet, in Nigeria, only a few universities accept students to specialize in popular music. This situation has to change. Nigeria should learn from Indian music industry and their curriculum.
- (iv) **Expansion on creativity in the curricula of universities:** It is hoped that the direct access to these composers' thoughts about the subjective experience of composing Western art music in the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century may also promote the image of a fragmented culture whose ghettoization in music education is a serious impediment to the development of a comprehensive aesthetic education (*cf.* Lapidika. 2007).
- (v) **Afro-beat and highlife:** As a classic popular music in Nigeria, these genres of music should be studied and their standards or philosophies discovered for younger generation of composers whose interest in such music may be aroused to venture into such paths. It would be very helpful to acknowledge

and draw philosophical implications for such music composition in schools from recognized composers' voices about their individual composing realities. Works of Fela Kuti, Lagbaja, and many Highlife exponents in Yoruba, Igbo, Efik/Ibibio, etc. should be documented and used in classroom practices to promote these cultures. In America, for instance, Jazz is currently competing favourably with European classical music; this is possible through research and rigorous academic activities of both professionals and academic (town and gown synergy).

- (vi) **Music technology:** The content and context of modern music technology has become very sophisticated. Studio Management, Audio Engineering, Music Production, Computer Music and Performance, etc. are the many issues on music technology that should be given adequate attention in the curriculum.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper examined emerging issues in compositional practice and challenges in Nigerian music education. It showed that Nigerian situation seems far from this reality of educational diversity, especially in the case of compositional expedition and compositional models within the university vis-a-vis the Nigerian music industry. The discourse has revealed five emerging issues in compositional practice between the Nigerian music education and the Nigerian music industry, the impact of archaic curriculum, and the challenges of meeting national development benchmarks. Findings from this study show a relative situation in Nigeria where composition major graduates do not fit appropriately into the Nigerian music industry space, thus finding the Nigerian music industry different from what is taught in school. The paper proposes an absolute integration of music (traditional music, popular music, church music, gospel music, studio creativity/music technology, and art music) in its entirety for studies in the university towards the realization of the growing need for national development, self-reliance, and adequately trained human resources relevant to national needs.

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