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Nigerian Traditional Music Education in the Context of Global Educational Challenges

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Abstract

So many changes taking place in our world today are dictated by forces which can originate in one corner of the globe while affecting the lives of millions of people elsewhere. One such area that has witnessed various forms of change is education. Yet, it does appear that the essence of education is still the same. The changes have happened more on the approaches to education than on the essence. This paper looks at the traditional music education in the face of the global challenges facing education. It makes a phenomenological appraisal of the trends and shows how there are shared and regional concerns of music education.

Introduction

The relevance of education in human development cannot be overemphasized. But the content, purpose and the methods of imparting knowledge differ from culture to culture. Despite these differences, the goal

of education is to evolve the human being and the human environment into higher and better forms. Education leads to good understanding of life and problems of life through a committed and responsible search for solutions to issues that confront humans and their environment. In Nigeria, exclusive attention is paid more to formal education than to informal and semi or non-formal education which were the principal systems of leading men and women out of ignorance in pre-Christian, pre-Islamic and pre-colonial times. This neglect has denied our present system of the good inherent in the traditional system. Traditional music education has been suppressed by the Western system which is yet neither at home nor has it allowed the formal survival of the traditional system.

Theoretical perspective

It has taken long for Western anthropologists, sociologists and educators to recognize that what happens in knowledge transfer in traditional societies in education. Their ideas about education were very Eurocentric, i. e based on European world view and civilizations like the Greek and Roman civilizations. The difference between these civilizations and other less esteemed societies lay in the quantum of knowledge, within them, in the way they expanded the horizon of and transmitted the knowledge, and in the way and extent to which they employed such systematic and cumulative knowledge as the basis of life and achievement. Knowledge, they argued, was there, as it remains everywhere, power. To understand the thinking behind the development of western educational system, there is need to mention the overriding influence of the men whose thought fashioned the social sciences. Such people include Spencer, Comte, Durkheim, Weber, and Karl Marx. According to Ake (in his *Social science as Imperialism: the Theory of Political Development*), “they saw society as moving through two or more stages from a less desirable state of being to a more desirable one” (2003: 125). This is the idea expressed by the theory of teleology. Thus in the different encounters of Nigerian societies, and indeed African societies in general, with Western culture through slavery, trade, invasion, missionary activities and colonialism, the perception of African societies as backward, primitive and in need of European civilization, has been a basic Western prejudice. Consequently the nature and orientation of the brand of education introduced and followed ever since has generally pushed aside the existing forms of education (including music education) in Nigeria. But, those traditional content and strategies have proved resilient and necessary for the survival of functional education in Nigeria.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of the paper is to observe the important role which cognitive processes involved in the transmission of education in traditional Nigerian societies might play in music education in the face of global educational challenges. It is a step in the direction of making positive transfer of traditional educational values to modern music education in the face of global educational challenges.

A classification of Nigerian music

In classifying the robust musical scene in the Nigeria, Omibiyi-Obidike (2002) gave a broad division of musicians into two, namely; traditional and non-traditional. But she derives from these two broad categories, five classes of music in Nigeria as follows.

- a. traditional music
- b. neo-traditional music
- c. church music
- d. popular music
- e. African art or contemporary music
- f. Religious music

This classification is related to that made by Euba which has two broad categories traditional and new music. Whereas the latter (new music) has four subdivisions:

- a. music in the church
- b. music in the concert hall
- c. music in the theatre
- d. music in the night club

The subdivisions clearly show a common denominator – place (church, concert hall, theatre and night club). Again these places at a closer look show that they are adaptations from foreign culture. The church, the concert hall, the theatre and the night club may have their approximations in, say, the Igbo culture but they are, strictly speaking, edifices that were not always there. Perhaps that is the reason for calling them new music. In all the classifications by the different musicologists above, traditional music show a marked consistency and continuity.

Okafor (2004) made two broad distinctions of Nigerian music namely: Ethnomusicology and popular music. This typology is new. Reason is that the academic scholarship of non western musical cultures, which is called ethnomusicology, has never been included among music types in Nigeria. But this new way of branding was on purpose because Okafor eventually located traditional music within Ethnomusicology as the following statement shows: “At the base of ethnomusicology is traditional music” (p.148).

Traditional music education in Nigeria

As in western education, the process of knowledge transfer in traditional societies has an underlying philosophy, purpose and method. In the transmission of culture and knowledge in the societies, conformity with the norms and values of the host society is central. A person is adjudged to be a human being or not if he or she is measured in the scale of the norms and values of the community and found wanting. Traditional education is anchored on five main principles, namely, child rearing practices, age group organization, apprenticeship system, festivals and ceremonies, and initiation ceremonies. Even though these may be regarded as institutionalized avenues of traditional education, they are by no means the only avenues for teaching traditional music. The learning of music is embedded in them and in many other numerous activities from infancy to adulthood. According to Fafunwa, “the education of a child in the Nigerian society starts from infancy.” (1995: 4). The immediate parents of the child take the primary responsibility of training the child. This is true of the Hausa, the Fulani and the Yoruba. Writing on the primacy of education in Igbo tradition, Ogbalu, stated clearly that the training of children begins with the parents. In his words, “*nzulite umuaka ndi Igbo na-ebido site n’aka nne na nna*”. (1981:47). But since the child belongs to the community, the child’s education becomes the responsibility of the whole community.

Traditional education is organized around social institutions and it is all-embracing. It is geared towards the acquisition of good character, abilities and skills for the authentic integration of the individual within his community. One social institution around which knowledge is organized is the age grade. Age is a huge factor in the psyche of Nigerians. Old age and grey hair are certainly associated with wisdom. One gets the impression as though grasped through intuition that traditional education was intended to inculcate wisdom more than mere knowledge of the formal structure. A

glimpse into the goals of traditional education outlined by Fafunwa shows the following:

- (a) To develop the child's latent physical skills.
- (b) To develop character
- (c) To inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority.
- (d) To develop intellectual skills
- (e) To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour
- (f) To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs
- (g) To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

The gradual realization of these goals takes a process of social integration.

According to Okafor (2004), traditional music is at the base of ethnomusicology. What it describes is actually almost the whole gamut of Igbo music. This is more familiar to most people than the other types of music. It is the indigenous music of a people which is an integral part of their life. It plays a functional part in all important stages of a person's life, especially birth, puberty, initiation, title-taking, marriage and death. Examples of such music include *Atiliogwu*, *egwu-ekpili* and the *mgbeleke/ngedegwu/ngelenge* music of the Igbo. It is the music that evokes from the community, experiences of a people and touches all aspects of their tradition, socio-cultural and political systems. Nearly two decades ago, Agu (1990) suggested that traditional and folk musics are synonymous terms that express the same reality. While tracing the original transmission and evolutionary processes of traditional music, he asserted that: "The folk music of people...evolves as a corporate communal experience. It has been handed down from generation to generation and continues expanding and enriching its resources as it evolves". (p.80)

The originator or composer of traditional music is not usually known. Perhaps taking pride in authorship of songs and dances was never in the character of the Igbo people. Songs and dances were communally owned and the process which ensured its survival was oral transmission, which demanded a great deal of fidelity to the original. This, however, did not protect traditional music from variations, mutilations and modifications. There are equally many authors who use the terms 'traditional' and 'folk'

synonymously. The word folk, itself refers to ordinary “people” both in English and its German version “volk”. There is, therefore, evidence of a common reality expressed by the two terms ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’. Some of the major characteristics of traditional music include:

- a. Its origin predates the emergence of the mass communication culture.
- b. It was never a saleable commodity.
- c. Its performance is strictly limited to some trained experts from the community.
- d. It was owned by the community or groups within it.
- e. It is usually vocal.
- f. It makes use of handy instruments
- g. It has a subject.
- h. Its transmission was through oral tradition
- i. It has survived in every Igbo community.

Agu (1990) identified various functions of traditional music which include:

- i. It serves as a medium for the transmission and encouragement of cultural ideals.
- ii. It acknowledges, condemns and discourages vices within the culture.
- iii. It serves as a custodian of the socio-cultural, religious and traditional life styles.
- iv. It relaxes and entertains the people.

Today, we are beginning to discover the great influence of traditional music on popular music as well as the subtle differences between traditional music and what is regarded now as folk music, which appears to be a hybrid from the traditional and popular styles. This form of differentiation remains unwelcoming by some people who think that the concept expressed by the term ‘folk’, was created by the *nouveaux-riche*. Two African American musicians, Louis Armstrong and the Blues singer, Big Bill Broonzy, are credited with the remark that music is folk music. “I ain’t never heard a horse sing a song”.

Traditional folk music touches every possible activity known in the community. So, it chooses subjects such as epic poetry, battles, tragedies, victory, satire, initiation, moonlight recreations, wrestling contests, hunting,

fishing, cooking, love, hatred and history. Agu further identified three main types of traditional music in Nigeria. This typology is based on function.

- ❖ Recreational music: This type of music is not tied to religious or cultural rites. It enhances socialization among the young, age grades, or peer groups. It is meant to entertain and relax the participants and audience. Example is *Kedu onye g'abu oyim*.
- ❖ Occasional music: This type of music is associated with rites, ceremonies, festivities, religious worship, kingship, initiation, birth, burial, marriage and funeral rites. It covers almost all the major activities of a community. Example is the funeral song *Anyi n'acho nwanne anyi*.
- ❖ Incidental music: It arises spontaneously in the process of executing a project. It is applied musical psychology, and it introduces or enhances the emotional and commitment strength of such workers. Example is *Bunu Bunu ibuanidanda*.

The three subdivisions above exhaust a wide range of song types within the traditional genre. Thus there are songs for initiation, birth and marriage ceremonies. An example of a marriage song is: *Ndi ogo unu abiala*

Moonlight songs are used at night recreations especially when the moon is full. Africa has the brightest day and the darkest night. Therefore, under full moon, one could easily read, to show the level of visibility that enables the phenomenon called *egwu onwa* or *Uro onwa*. It usually takes place in village squares in different villages. Songs are used for socializing purposes, stories are told. Sometimes there is a wrestling bout between villages or kindred. One of the songs that easily come to mind as moonlight song is *uri oma* which is sung in the context of a story.

Wrestling music comes in as a morale booster for the wrestlers as their supporters cheer them from the sides while they battle it out in the circle ring that is drawn by hand on sand. An Example of wrestling song is *Ndi anyi ka aka* and *oburu n'isi*.

Title-taking music is common among the tribes of Nigeria. Many people are title freaks who will spend their life's savings on title taking which is usually very expensive, depending on the level of the title in the social rating or administrative positioning. Thus, the title of 'Ezeani' in Neni, for instance,

will warrant a seven day ceremony of eating and drinking, and of course music making. An example of music played on such occasion is *Onye chi mere eze*. This music is equally played on royal events.

Royal music, strictly speaking, is meant for the king or kingly events like coronation or *Igba ofala*. The *Igba Eze* (Royal drum) music is most suited for kingly or chieftaincy events. Eighty percent of the time, it is purely instrumental music and dance. At other times, there is an added vocal music performed in a call and response style. An example of this is the *Ekwueme music*, which is the *Igba eze* music of the Akpo-Ekwueme Social Club of Nigeria.

Ritual or Cultic music is used for traditional worship or sacrifice. The *mbem* or *ima mbem* style of singing is associated with this. Most of the contents are derived from the spontaneous creativity of the performer. There are also cultic dances that accompany the sites. Sometimes, it is usually a recounting of the powers and accomplishments of a particular deity.

Satirical songs can be sung by an individual who is spending a private time. It can equally be performed by a group like the women or age-grade, as one of their songs. There is hardly any group that is dedicated entirely to the singing or performance of only satire.

Cradle songs and Lullabies abound in Igbo music gallery. These are songs used to tranquilize a child or make the child go to sleep. Cradle songs form part of the first music that initiate a child into the very musical culture of the Igbo. This is because the nanny or whoever carries the baby as a duty sings most of these songs to the baby, composes some and learns some from other people. It is most amazing how babies recognize these songs and respond almost each time with consistent gestures or smiles even in the midst of a cry. An example is *Onye gburu nwa na ebe akwa* or *Nwa nnunu ukwu nwa nnunu nta*.

Hunting music is used by hunters when they are out in the field after their game or when they make a kill. It is becoming very rare as community hunting is no longer very common. There are hunting guilds like the *Egbeni Oba* in some Igbo communities.

Fishing music is heard more by fishermen or the fishing people of the riverside areas. Oguno (2006) in his *The Albatross of fishing songs in Igbo land – A case study of songs of Igbokenyi Fishermen*, made a survey of the

problems that besiege the ancient practice by urbanization and westernization.

Burial or Funeral music has a very wide range of songs and dances concerning death and dying. Circumstances of a person's death influence the choice of songs that are sung or performed at the burial or funeral of the deceased. Different musics are played on such occasion, like different masquerade dances, *amaala* music which is the traditional music of the traditionalists.

Masquerade Music is any music performed or meant for the masquerade group. But all masquerades are not the same, hence there is a distinction made by Nzewi (1991) between (a) mytho-mystical masquerades and (b) masked dancers that are dedicated to entertainment and performance without any attachment to the display or manipulation of magical or supernatural forces. But we would like to add another distinction based on the time of the day that the masquerade makes appearances. There are, therefore daylight and night time masquerades. Hence, *Ijele, Ulaga, Okpolumpi, Ichoku, Nyikiriputu, Izaga*, are all daylight masquerades whereas *Achukwu, Ayaka, Ogbaagu, Omenikoro* are all night masquerades and are considered more dangerous by all. Some masquerades have indeed popularized Igbo music beyond the narrow confines of their rural communities. Mention should be made of the famous *Njima* music by *Pericomo* and *Ikan Power*, from Arondizuogu and the numerous albums they have given to a vast and appreciative audience spanning nearly four decades. There is equally the music of the *Ichoku* masquerade

The question of global challenges

The overriding power of the media, economy and indeed the politics of democracy and capitalism have all painted an erroneous picture of the expectations that cultures have to bring along to the global table. The overthrow of informal and semi-formal education by the formal type is one clear example of how traditional value was not considered as part of an authentic human experience. Traditional music education in schools is a recent thing. Even at that, attention is given more to Western musical tradition. But the real global challenge in music education should begin with an authentic articulation of the various traditions, contents, methods and purposes and bringing them to the global table. This is the only approach that can give music education a global character. The Western stereotype taught in many schools in Nigeria is nothing but a sad commentary in view of the

mounting challenges. The idea of Campbell (2004) is that global teaching of music should focus on experiencing music and expressing culture. The Nigerian music-teaching culture, for instance is based on teacher-to-student learning through imitation and repetition and not on the understanding of musical scores. The view of Campbell is poignant on this:

As musicians learn their craft, they employ techniques that appear widespread across traditions and cultures...people become more musical through their enculturation, training and learning. Learning is a multisensory experience and the aural, visual, and kinesthetic capacities are called into play in acquiring techniques and repertoire.... Imitation is a critical device in learning music in formal and informal settings...notation is simply not helpful in some traditions, where the direct teacher-to-student passage of music-making is the key. (2004: 6-7)

The issue of global challenges is not, therefore, mere conformity to the musical experiences of dominant Western cultures. It is rather recognizing and harmonizing the local and global musical identities and making them part of the theories and strategies for music education. This is more so because the resilience of the musical traditions of Nigeria shows that in real life situations, traditional music is closer to the hearts of the people than music learnt within a formal school.

Conclusion

Music education in of Nigeria has come down to us through the process of oral tradition. The reason is simple: there has not been a home-grown system of notation. The area has therefore become fertile for various ethno musicological activities. These scholarly activities have shown the following:

- (i) That traditional music remains a vital feature of the people's life.
- (ii) That music in Nigerian tradition has never been mere sonic object. It has always been associated with life and functions in the lives of people as integral part of events.
- (iii) That transmission was through the process of imitation.

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- (iv) The non-formal system of learning was apprenticeship which took a long time.
- (v) That cross-cultural contacts affected the music of people.

- (vi) That a relationship existed between a people and their language, dance, costume, way of life and their instruments.
- (vii) That traditional music was never meant for purely commercial purposes.
- (viii) That the absence of notation ensured the survival of improvisation and variations.
- (ix) That traditional music embedded in the texts, lessons of life, folklores, histories and epics and values of the people all wrapped into one.
- (x) That the absence of a written system of notation and highly formalized teaching and learning structures did not affect the artistic, aesthetic and therapeutic values of traditional music.

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