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THE RELEVANCE OF MUSIC EDUCATION TO THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Stephen Olusoji
University of Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of music education to the Nigerian educational system. It identifies the prospects, problems and proffered possible solutions to them. In achieving its objectives the study uses ethnographic and qualitative methods with simple percentages for eliciting and collation of data. The paper suggests that the society, the curriculum planners, and the government have much to do so music education is appreciated in Nigeria. It proposes as part of its recommendations that the government provide necessary facilities and personnel for music to thrive as a vocational subject; and that parents and the larger society must become educated on the usefulness of music as a career subject worth pursuing by pupils.

Keywords: Music Education, Nigeria Education

Introduction

From time immemorial, various types of cultural heritage were passed on to the next generation through informal educational methods. One of this is music. In the Pre-Independence years, music education had remained largely informal in Nigeria, it was transmitted through the various traditional media such as traditional festivals, work songs, moonlight plays, lullabies and children nursery rhymes, court music, apprenticeship under a well-known traditional musicians and others (Andrew, 1998; Ekwueme, 1983; Euba, 1982; Nketia, 1974).

With the advent of western education, which came through the Christian missionaries in collaboration with the British colonial government, in the early part of twentieth century, the curriculum of the missionaries was geared towards literary education as they focused on the arts including, music, drama, and poetry among others, in their efforts to evangelize to the “natives”. In this way the awareness for formal music education was raised through the inclusion of music in the school curriculum.

The media houses also helped to raise the importance of music education through various talks on the theory and historical values of music education. With the awareness brought about by western education, Nigeria has been able to produce well-known music scholars like, Professor Fela Sowande, Ayo Bankole, Lazarus Ekwueme, Akin Euba, and Akpabot Sam, to mention but few.

The major questions that are asked in this paper are: (a) What are the roles of music education in the society? (b) Is the stigmatization of traditional musicians as beggars and people of lower status still prevalent today? (c) Why are pupils usually discouraged by their parents from choosing music as a career? (d) What are the major problems confronting music as a subject in the Nigerian educational system?

The above questions and other issues are germane to this study. In collecting data for the study, ethnographic and quantitative and qualitative methods were employed using simple percentages as basis for analyzing qualitative collected data in a quantitative presentation.

Theoretical Framework

The main focus of this paper is the importance of music education to the Nigerian society. This subject cannot be adequately discussed without looking at the philosophical and sociological premise of music as an art and its relevance and implications to the society. According to Plato in his book *The Republic*, speaking of the Old Athenian education about 450 B.C. He said:

Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other because rhythm and harmony find their way into the secret places of the soul, on which they might fasten imparting grace and making the soul graceful of him who is rightly educated.

While Reimer (1970) opined that:

Until music education understands what it really has to offer, until it is convinced of the facts that it is necessary rather than a peripheral part of human culture, until it “feels in its bones” that its value is a fundamental one it will not have attained the peace of mind which is the mark of maturity (p. 3).

The quotations above emphasized the importance of music as an integral and indispensable part of ancient civilizations and contemporary societies. What then is the place of music and musicians in traditional African society?

The Role of Music in Traditional African Society

Music is a product of the behavior of human groups whether formal or informal (Blacking, 1973, p. 58).

The caption above from Blacking aptly sums up the roles and functions of music in any society and this is also true of the African society. "From the cradle to the grave" the African eats, sleeps, and wake-ups with music. It passes on musical art through oral and informal sources either during festivals, gathering in the village square, court music, and so on. Other avenues for showcasing music that could also offer opportunities for tapping musical knowledge are through observation or direct participation in musical activities at home and school. The traditional musicians in some parts of Africa, especially in Nigeria, are treated with disdain, regarded as belonging to the lowest echelon of the society as they are given various derisive tags such as beggars, ne'er do well, and people not to be associated with in the society.

Perhaps, these commonly held views of music and musicians had rubbed onto music and its usefulness as a career subject worth studying by pupils. Fafunwa (1971) opined that:

There is much truth in the saying, a cultureless people are a hopeless people. The teaching of music and art in African schools is still considered as a frill by many an educator. Yet there is hardly any other subject through which the artistic and creative genius of a people can be more easily expressed and perpetuated. Art and music touch the spirit and soul of the child and African art and music form the focus of the African culture (p.74-75).

The aforementioned excerpt captures the essence of improper propagation of music education in Africa and how music is a spiritual art to the Africans and that it enhanced and developed its artistic and creative mind. However, Vidal (2008) in an analytical review of major problems confronting music education in Nigeria within the last century stated that:

- i) That formal music education was institutionalized in the schools at the beginning to serve the interests of the missionaries and colonial administrations.
- ii) That the type of music education introduced was alien to Nigerian culture and traditions.
- iii) That attempts to correct this though, successful with other subject did not yield much success in music, thus making music lag behind other subject such as language, literature, drama in terms of cultural development and orientation.
- iv) That research was not carried out into the contents and teaching methods of the music of cultures and societies of Nigeria.
- v) That efforts were again made after independence to make education, including music education functional and relevant to the needs of Nigeria and the African child.
- vi) That necessary structures were not put in place to concretize the new ideas on music education.

Studies similar to the one above by Vidal were carried out by Faseun (2001), Adegbite (1999), Okafor (1988), Omibiyi (1987) and Sowande (1962).

Contemporary Problems Facing Music Education in Nigeria

This researcher made an attempt to find out the major problems facing the study of music in Nigerian secondary schools and tertiary institutions and the perceptions of the society about Music as school courses. In the quest to find out and solve problems bedeviling the educational sector, a total number of 104 students of the University of Lagos, Lagos State University, and Musical Society of Nigeria, Music School offering music as a course were given a questionnaire and participated in the study. This consisted of 45 females and 59 males with ages ranging from 16-24 years. The questionnaire was designed to cater for two categories of students of the aforementioned institutions: A. Those transiting from secondary to higher institutions and are in their first year, and B. Those in the middle and final years. Those in the first category (A) were asked questions such as:

- (a) Why they choose music as a career?
- (b) Whether they encountered any objections from their parents for choosing music?
- (c) Did they choose music as the last resort after failure to make entry requirements for other courses?
- (d) Whether they did music in their secondary schools;
- (e) What was their musical background; whether they sang in the church choir, came from a family of musicians, participated in any form of communal musical activities, etc.
- (f) What was their role model in music?

Those in the second category (B) were asked more matured questions such as:

- (a) What the public perception of school music and music scholars is?
- (b) Whether the traditional stigma attached to music and music practitioners has reduced?
- (c) What they intend to achieve with their music education, (e.g. to be a pop star? to promote serious music?)
- (d) Whether the training given to them in Nigerian institutions prepares them to compete and fit properly into the saturated labor market; and also compete favorably with their peers studying other disciplines and on the global stage? And
- (e) Students were asked to comment on the provision of facilities and education structures and availability of competent instructors.

The questionnaires were personally distributed by the researcher to the respondents who were guided on how to properly answer them. After completion and collation by the researcher, the responses were analyzed and the frequencies were then used as percentages.

Findings

Findings from the study showed that:

- (a) Students had problems convincing their parents about their choice of music as a career. 79% of the population said their parents disliked music as a career for their wards. It was particular visible in the responses of the female respondents whose parents felt it is a profession for men not women, while others had problems drawing lines between music as vocation and avocation.
- (b) The findings also indicated that most respondents choose music out of frustration of not making the required grades for their first choice courses and their attempt to get admission to the university in any other available courses with a lower requirement. 65% of respondents had positive responses to the question (c) above for Category A respondents.

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- (c) The age-long stigma attached to music is still quite prevalent in contemporary times, as undergraduates still encountered derogatory remarks from the society on their choice of music as a course and profession.
 - (d) As a follow-up to the aforementioned, most of the respondents generally chose pop icons, both local and international, as their role models and would rather chart and pursue their career in popular music because of the immediate financial rewards rather than a career in classical music.
 - (e) Students showed total disappointment regarding the training, facilities, and instructors in most Nigerian institutions. A total of 65% of the respondents were of the opinion that facilities used for instruction were inadequate and obsolete; 35% opined that more competent and well-trained instructors should be employed; and 40% expressed that the curriculum should be broadened to cater for and accommodate different areas of interest of students as some would like to specialize in areas, such as, studio management, entrepreneurial or music business, music therapy, and other specializations that were not currently offered in most Nigerian institutions.

Recommendations

In this paper, we have looked at the problems confronting music education in Nigeria. We found out about problems of supporting music education. Some ways these problems can be adequately tackled are by the tripartite parties of parents-society-government. We recommended that parents should be properly enlightened about the usefulness of music education and should allow gifted pupils to pursue a career in music. We also propose that the mass media should do more to promote music education by offering programs that will show the ideals of music education. Likewise, guidance counselors must double their efforts in giving proper advice to pupils and parents on career choice and paths.

The society should be educated on the usefulness of music education and its benefits to the society. Finally, government should not neglect the arts and should do more to fund it for “art they say is life.” The curriculum planner should also look at the contents of music curriculum and include local content that would make music education more relevant and meaningful to the society.

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