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African Indigenous Knowledge System as a Catalyst for Enriching Nigeria's Music Education Programme

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Abstract

The uniqueness of African indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and the benefits of integrating them into Africa's music educational programme were some of the issues that occupied the front burner at the birth of the Pan African Society for Musical Arts Education (PASMAE). It represented one of the responses to the wake up call to Africa to look inward in search of truly African sensitive and African-oriented solutions to a myriad of her music educational challenges in the world that is changing with bewildering speed. This paper x-rays the contents of music programmes in Nigeria's tertiary institutions with a view to identifying IKS elements contained in them. Using observation and a checklist of curriculum implementation of Nigeria's leading music technology programme as methodology, the paper highlights challenges confronting implementers in realizing set objectives. Findings confirm that the abundant richness of Africa's IKS is yet to be harnessed. The paper concludes by making specific recommendations on how various stakeholders, including the Department of Music Technology, the Polytechnic, Ibadan, can innovatively achieve the much-desired goal of standardization, fabrication, massive production and promotion of traditional musical instruments to facilitate practical teaching.

Introduction

Long before their contact with the Western European culture, each African society, including Nigeria, has its own well established and systematized body of knowledge which had sustained its development in all ramifications. In other words, the pre-colonial Nigerian society had indigenous and self reliant strategies in various sectors such as agriculture, by way of food production, provision of functional and appropriate shelter, otherwise known as housing, efficient planning and management of settlements, performing arts, health and other issues relating to their well-being in general. All these are clearly evident by the activities of the custodians of the culture knowledge among the people as farmers, rural

artisans, performing artists, priests, traditional medical practitioners and so forth. It is these systems that provided requisite platform for understanding how members of the community react to changing sets of problems and challenges as well as strategies they have adopted in order to ensure equilibrium and maintenance of appropriate levels of quality of life.

It is a well known fact that Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is receiving much attention in academia globally (Hagar, 2003: 336). This is because IK had proved most beneficial to many countries such as Singapore, India, Brazil and China, to mention but a few, who were once described as developing nations. In their quest for solutions to myriads of challenges which once faced them, these countries looked inwards for the way out of the quandary as a result of their former subservient posture to the Western European knowledge and way of life. The result was outstanding, for it brought about the marked difference and transformation in virtually every sector of the lives of their citizenry. For instance, China had to shut down herself to the outside world for many decades before a self discovery facilitated by IK which had now made the country a toast of many nations today. This underscores the kind of transformation which IK is capable of impacting on a people.

An understanding of a symbiotic relationship or an interface between IK and the process of music enculturation (teaching and learning) in African context is central to how the term musical arts education is conceived and constructed in this paper. Nzewi (2003) has argued that it is only in Western-European nomenclature that a distinct separatist posture in the performance arts disciplines of music, dance, drama, poetry and costume exist. They are conceptually intertwined in the worldview of Africans. This explains why the term: '*musical arts*' is preferred to music. It equally accounts for why the name: Pan African Musical Arts Education (PASMAE) was adopted by the professional body of music educators on the African continent instead of music education, the name by which her counterparts across the world are known. According to Samuel (2015), musical arts education has been recognized to engender holistic development of the socio-cultural aspect of nations that have explored its potentials, because it facilitates tremendous growth of a country's physical and human resources.

Meki Nzewi, in his presidential address to the assembly and delegates of the 3rd biennial conference of the PASMMAE held at Kisumu, Kenya in July, 2003, noted as follows:

We must bear in mind that the musical arts in Africa, long before the modern systems, was the indefatigable organ that marshalled African indigenous health, political, social, religious and recreational services with the integrity and credits appertaining to its sincere practitioners. If musical arts education in Africa will truly derive from Africa's rich knowledge base, we must engage in research at home levels. We must re-institute African concepts, meanings, theories and values of the musical arts education and practice.

In a similar vein, Masoga (2003:6) categorically stated that African music education debates should be accountable to African communities in terms of their *locus operandi* and not to the ivory towers that consider themselves centers of excellence while they remain irrelevant to the African context-content relationship. He also challenged African scholars to begin to grapple with the concept of the local critical mind in order to make their contributions to African societies, primarily as a social obligation, thereby translating them into social intellectuality that is fully monitored, interpreted, challenged, engaged and located with the people.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to examine how the potentials of African indigenous knowledge system could be harnessed to produce a much-improved and efficient musical arts education within the Nigerian schools, and by extension, on the continent of Africa. The paper is organized into five sections. The second after this brief introduction contains clarifications and definitions of concepts as: enriching, IK, its principles, constituents, scope and limitations. The third section narrates some of PASMMAE's past bold efforts in seeking solutions to the problems of music education in Africa as well as how to accelerate development in the field. It further reviews how the impetus has or has not been sustained. An attempt is made in the fourth section to draw attention to the challenges of integrating IK into musical arts education as it concerns different stakeholders particularly institutions responsible for implementing music/instrumental technology in Nigeria. The fifth and final section articulates some specific recommendations as to the way forward on how to fully deploy and

integrate IK resources into musical arts education endeavor and by so doing enrich its contents to deliver a more effective and enduring musical arts education system in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarifications

To enrich simply means to enhance the quality of something, to improve the quality of something, usually by adding something else to it. In nutrition parlance, it means to increase the nutritional content(s) of food by adding certain substances such as vitamins or minerals and thereby improve its nutritional value. It does not in any way suggest that such a product or thing is bad in itself; rather that it could be made better. It is against this background that this paper posits that the musical arts educational system of Nigeria may not necessarily be outrightly bad owing to its skewed nature in favour of the western imposition (as currently being run). Rather, my intention is to itemize some 'nourishing' ingredients of IK which would make it more beneficial in many respects. It is therefore meant to act as a catalyst in order to generate more ideas on what and how IK can assist in taking the musical arts education to the next level.

Defining Indigenous Knowledge

What is meant by Indigenous Knowledge (IK)? Perhaps, the best approach to seeking an appropriate answer to the foregoing question is to try to singly define both words: indigenous and knowledge starting with the latter. Knowledge is the awareness and understanding of facts, truths or information gained in the form of experience or learning. It is an appreciation of the possession of interconnected details, which, in isolation, are of lesser value. It also consists of justified true beliefs. In a nutshell, knowledge is what is known and understood.

On the other hand, the word indigenous means belonging to or originating in a place. It refers to a style which occurred naturally in an area. It is 'native' and not introduced. Rather than being a single, cohesive structures, stocks or stores, Thompson and Scoones (1994) define knowledge systems as a social process; a multiplicity of actors and networks through which certain kinds of technical and social information are communicated and negotiated. Oftentimes, the Western Knowledge System (WKS) and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are usually on both sides of the divide. Hence, a distinction between the two categories of knowledge systems is very common in academic circle. According to Dewes (1993), the former was widely popularized and universalized, while the latter is

being greatly suppressed in most parts of the world. Warren and Rajasekaran's (1993:8) definition of IK is perhaps one of the most encompassing. They defined IK as the systematic body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments and intimate understanding of the environment in a given culture.

One important feature of IK is its uniqueness to a group of people as it serves as a springboard to their development in all ramifications. In addition, IK is dynamic rather than static; holistic and culturally bound; oral-based, experiential and highly accessible. Its local knowledge is possessed and practised by women and men, though regarded as intangible resource which is highly vulnerable to commercial exploitation. It promotes meaningful communication between extension agents and their clientele and serves as a ready tool towards the attainment of self reliance and sustainability.

In terms of scope, IK is universally encompassing, covering the full range of disciplines and issues. It features prominently in almost all areas of human endeavors, including agriculture, housing, trade and commerce, transportation, science and technology, music and related arts, tourism and recreation, health and diseases, environmental, education and training and natural resources to mention but a few.

PASMAE's past efforts in seeking African sensitive and African-oriented solutions to musical arts education challenges

The uniqueness of African indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and the benefits of integrating them into Africa's music educational programme were some of the issues which occupied the front burner when the organization known today as the Pan African Society for Musical Arts Education (PASMAE) was born and re-christened. At the second edition of the conference of the society held in Lusaka, Zambia, Meki Nzewi presented a thought provoking keynote address entitled 'music education in Africa: mediating the imposition of western music education with the imperatives of the indigenous African practice'. He challenged participants to the conference in the following words:

The Western world has arrogated itself the authority to arbitrarily impose as well as perpetuate Western thought systems and inapplicable categories or classifications on

unique aspects of African mental-cultural systems, some of which are strange to the European-American human as well as mental-cultural experiences. Africa's mental and cultural practices are founded on Africa-viable philosophical and systemized rationalizations. This fact of Africa's original mental genius the West continues to ignore. Europeans and Americans have thereby adamantly insisted on authoritatively misinterpreting Africa, as well as mal-educating themselves about Africa. Inevitably, the misguided and mentally insecure contemporary Africans also become mal-educated on certain issues relating particularly to Africa's mental civilization (Nzewi, 2001:92-93).

Nzewi's presentation was more or less a wake up call to African music educators to look inward in search of truly African sensitive and African-oriented solutions to myriads of her music educational challenges in the world that is changing with bewildering speed.

Tremendous efforts were made in the following years to position the society for the onerous task ahead to bring about desired changes. Some of the initiatives and efforts included embarking on book projects in form of organizing writers' workshop and also those which emanated from Pasmae conference proceedings, the establishment of Musical Action Research Teams also known as MAT cells which were to act as linking collaborative network whereby musical arts educators throughout Africa could share and learn from one another. In addition, Directors of Educational Resource management, Music Technology and MAT cells were appointed to coordinate some society's vital need areas as identified at different fora and meetings.

Taking a retrospective look, one can ask how have members and indeed the society fared in responding to or sustaining the impetus? After the initial generous funding from such agencies as the Norwegian government, the National Research Fund (NRF) in South Africa and a few other available ones ceased, it has become increasingly more challenging to sustain various laudable programmes and initiatives by Pasmae. It is a fact that many African musical arts educators and scholars still find it very difficult to obtain funding to enable them attend and participate in music conferences, workshops, seminars organized locally, regionally or internationally. These are clearly manifested in form of few numbers of

participants or in some situations, none participation at such avenues where their potentials could be further enhanced through cross fertilization of ideas with colleagues and building and sustenance of networks.

The idea of organizing sub-regional conferences was one of such strategies and pragmatic steps taken by PASMAE's executives at inception to assess and refocus the organization after the bus of the society ran into a stormy weather. Apart from creating better awareness about the society and her activities with a view for membership drive because of lack of funding for members to attend conferences (especially when held far from their contiguous zones), it was also envisioned that a sub-regional meeting was more likely to focus on issues that are homogenous in nature. As a result, solutions to be proffered were also more often than not, likely to be easily more adaptable than when they are generalized or attempted to be applied across the sub Saharan Africa. In other words, the closer or nearer the units, the more appropriate and relevant the solutions might be.

One of the issues that is agitating the mind of this writer is how can the recommendations of those conferences be translated into concrete, workable and sustainable action plans? Secondly, what practical steps must be taken to ensure that the destiny of music education as a profession is positively enhanced? These questions are apt and should never be trivialized. It will amount to a great disservice to the profession if members' major agenda for organizing and attending academic meetings, presenting papers at conferences remains to beat the 'publish or perish' syndrome as found in many institutions of learning within the African continent.

In trying to contextualize the foregoing issues, this author is not unmindful of the need to apprehend the concept of IK from a global perspective. This is because a holistic comprehension of indigenous knowledge is achievable only when scholars refrain from the common reductionistic binarism of Western against (African) indigenous knowledge. My position in this paper transcends using IKS as a counter-hegemonic tool. As we embark on a journey of self-discovery, Ntuli (2002: 54) advised that we need to 'deconstruct the very notion of IKS and expose the double standards that Eurocentrism and its African converts practice'. She further argued that until African scholars began to rethink the archaeology of their own origins and their thought systems by re-examining the paths which other nations

undertook in their drive from underdevelopment to development, it is doubtful if Africans can be freed from imposed Eurocentric thought.

Some challenges facing IK in the development process

A summary of the findings from numerous scholars including Dewes (1993), Hagar (2003) and Samuel (2015) on challenges inhibiting maximization of IK's full potentials towards ensuring sustainable development not only in music education, but also other fields of study in Nigeria include the following:

- a) IK is not adequately researched and documented. This has accounted for its current underutilized status
- b) Increased suspicion and genuine fears of marginalization, exploitation and infringement of the intellectual property rights of custodians of indigenous knowledge by researchers, national and multinational bodies who ought to be partners in progress
- c) It is a bit tough integrating IK with western scientific knowledge
- d) Stigmatization of IK as primitive, simple and static and difficulty in erasing these negative ideas
- e) Lackluster attitude of government agencies in promoting IK
- f) Difficulty on the part of IK advocates (especially professional associations) in pushing it through to attract the attention and interest of policy-makers and other stakeholders
- g) Non-integration of IK practitioners (custodians) into faculty board and decision-making body
- h) Lack of adequate encouragement of various professional bodies to recognize, incorporate and utilize appropriate local knowledge in their plans and activities
- i) Failure to gear partners such as donor agencies and multilateral companies and so forth to support the aforementioned efforts

Mapping Nigeria's State of Affairs: A Focus on the Music Technology Programme

An appraisal of the contents of the curricula of music programme in Nigeria's tertiary institutions clearly reveals that the abundant richness of Africa's IKS is not fully harnessed, particularly in the area of music technology. At present, Nigeria's tertiary education stands on a tripod, namely, the university, polytechnic and college of education systems. Music is offered in each of the foregoing institutions of learning, and by extension music technology is listed as one of the courses/subjects to be

offered by students in these institutions. Specifically, The Polytechnic, Ibadan prides itself as the only institution in the country that has the Department of Music Technology, which runs full programmes in music technology. The expectation, therefore, as envisioned in the objectives of the programme is that after more than two decades of operating the programme, remarkable progress would have been made in addressing and finding solutions to the problem of standardization of traditional musical instruments. Until this is achieved, it is evident that the department cannot enter the next crucial phase of fabrication and massive production and distribution of traditional musical instruments which would invariably promote and facilitate practical teaching of indigenous instruments in the various departments of music in the country.

Following a careful observation and using a checklist, which both formed the basis for an evaluation of the implementation of the music technology programme in the department by the author, it was revealed that students performed comparatively much better in music courses than in the area of technological. Omibiyi-Obidike was a notable scholar who had worked extensively on African traditional musical instruments, particularly those from Nigeria. The late matriarch of African musicology and music education was at the fore front of advocacy for the standardization of African traditional instruments (Omibiyi-Obidike, 2007). If the submissions and suggestions made in her studies and presentations had been translated into policy statements and the vision vigorously pursued by concerned stakeholders in form of concrete steps in the right direction, there ought to have been tremendous positive changes in the state of affairs of music education in the country.

Nigeria can learn from the Ghanaian experience as evident by the late Dr. Ephraim Amu's pioneering efforts at combining indigenous knowledge of drums and bamboo flutes with Western musicology to strike a fair balance in choral and instrumental art music compositions. His unrelenting efforts yielded an outstanding result when the traditional *atenteben* (bamboo flute) became elevated into a scholarly and an international musical instrument. The challenge of adopting such a model as actualized by Ghana still subsists for Nigeria today and one can confidently argue that such a pragmatic approach is the way forward.

Findings also revealed that the services of competent human resources (makers of traditional instruments) are not engaged as instructors/facilitators on the staff list of the music technology department of the Polytechnic, Ibadan. More than two decades of operating the programme, at least two notable members of staff who ventured into practical instrumental technology were unfortunately among those laid off, as a result of the state government's negative policy of downsizing, which led to massive retrenchment of workers in the institution. With the use of local materials, one of them had successfully constructed marimba-xylophones, recorders and other traditional musical instruments, which the department ought to improve upon. After his forced and untimely retirement, the man had established a family business/industry where production of traditional instruments is being carried out. The import of this action is that it had one way or the other led to a reversal of whatever gain was experienced at the inception of the programme.

It is however gratifying to note that interested graduates of the institution on completion of their diploma programme in music technology more often than not, choose to spend the mandatory one year allotted for the student's industrial working experience scheme (SIWES) to gain practical experience under the supervision of any approved experienced industry-based personnel. Our findings however reveal that there is little of no official collaboration between the department and these individuals in evolving a systematic and sustainable programme which would have assisted in maximizing these human resources towards a better realization of the objectives of the department.

Recommendations and conclusion

There is the need to realize that there is no closed society. As a result, IK would continue to co-exist and interact with knowledge acquired through western education or and from other cultures of the world. It is possible to raise the issue of replacement of traditionalism with modernism, but it is apt and beneficial to suggest the need to identify, appreciate and build the capacity of IK practitioners in order to positively address the challenges earlier raised. In addition, it is further recommended that no efforts should be spared in conducting intensive research on Africa's IKS and thereby ensuring its proper documentations towards advancing knowledge for shared growth in all ramifications. The need to rejuvenate moribund Music Action Research Teams (MAT cells) and establishment of new ones across

Africa, south of the Sahara is most crucial in this regard. Their role as catalyst in generating data upon which advocacy to government agencies would be predicated to foster this desired positive change is most crucial at this point in time.

In order to expand the capacity of the students/products of music technology, it is hereby suggested that lecturers and instructors should encourage them to be more innovative and explore more areas in instrumental technology/ project fabrication rather than trying to re-invent the wheels by duplicating some past ideas. Furthermore, in the light of the fact that the department is the first, and probably still the only Department offering Music Technology as a course of study in Nigeria, her products are expected to display and record innovative strides. This will require more collaboration with professional technologists in their contiguous area and beyond. There is the need to improve on the variety of traditional instruments being produced by final year students as projects. More importantly, however is the need to improve on the quality and quantity of these instruments.

It is further recommended that academic music professional bodies should create different platforms, including but not limited to organizing pre-conference training workshops for interested members to further sharpen their skills in the area of music technology. In addition, opportunities to showcase innovations in this area should also be provided by leaders and organizers during annual general meetings. These will encourage more individuals to get involved in promoting local solutions to our peculiar challenges, especially in the area of instrumental technology.

Finally, it is suggested that PASMAE as well as other national bodies should intensify efforts towards a much stronger advocacy to the government in order to ensure that there is a positive turn around in their attitude towards integrating IKS into the music educational system in the country. All stakeholders should see one another as partners in progress and henceforth desist from working at cross purpose.

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