

# MUSIC EDUCATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this article is on music and culture. The paper looked into the concept of music and education, it also explained what culture is and how music is used as an instrument for cultural identity. It concluded by outlining how music education has helped in promoting cultural values in the Nigerian society.

## **Introduction:**

Music is an aspect of every culture worldwide. From primitive society to very advanced society, music is well established. This is why some music scholars adjudged music as a universal language.

The basic ingredient of music is sound - sound that is planting to the ear, that is why the Chambers Dictionary (New Edition, 1973) describes music as: the art of expression in sound, in melody and harmony, including both composition and execution i.e. the art of instrumental performance. Similarly, the American Heritage Dictionary (second edition 1982) refers to music as vocal or instrument sounds possessing rhythm, melody and harmony.

Music is taught in every society, though the medium of instruction may differ depending on the sophistication of given society. In the primitive non-literate society, music instruction is by oral transmission. But in the advanced, literate and organized society, music education has grown more complex, where modern medium/media and instructional materials are now adopted to facilitate the teaching and learning of music. This brings us to the issue of what education is.

Many scholars have been laboured by this concept over the years. Suffice it to say that education goes on in every society whether literate or non-literate. In order to survive society must pass on basic skills, information and beliefs from one generation to other. This is the crux of education; transmission of values, skills, information and beliefs. As such education can be described as the process by which an individual gains knowledge, insight or develop attitude or skills {Encyclopedia Americana Vol.9, p.642}.

Fafunwa (1974) sees education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to society which he lives. By this we can agree with Adeogun (2000) when he said that music education is a programme designed to instill relevant and necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes of music into the learner. He goes further to say that music education strives to foster musically healthy society; understanding and appreciation of artistic qualities of music; transmission as well as imagination, improvement of physical and mental health, provision of musically literate populace as well as core musical manpower who are capable of learning in order to interpret a society to itself and to the wider community of other culture".

Culture on the other hand is another concept that scholars have given many interpretations to. Be that as it is, culture is a store or reservoir of knowledge. It is also a record of societal beliefs, values, attitude and history. Culture is the way of life of people that have been evolved over a period of time. It includes the way they eat, talk, their social, political, economic, religious, historical, psychological, philosophical and education activities. According to Ohaway (1970), culture is the total way of life of a society, it includes the way of eating, wearing clothes, using language, making love, getting married etc.

The task of cultural transmission is the concern of every society. Music is a significant part of cultural heritage. It has always been an integral part of African life and the same time an indispensable factor in human existence and cultururation becomes the responsibility of everyone. According to Okafor in Adesokan (2000) no study of culture is complete without a close corresponding study of the music of the people. Merriam (1959) agreed with this view when he said that music is a reflection of the culture of which they are part. As such, music which featured in African societies, serves as means of transmitting cultural values like festivals, skills, knowledge

and norms which are cherished by the society.

### **How Has Music Fostered Cultural Identity?**

Every society has own peculiar culture, which is quite distinct to them. The peculiarity of culture is further buttressed by the activity of music. In this regard, the notion that music is a universal language may not stand. This is because, music is one medium/factor of identifying various cultural groups in the world. While other cultural values worldwide are been integrated, the same cannot be said of music. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (1995), the concept of identity has to do with the prove or to recognize something, to equate or associate or characteristics an individual or group. If this is so, then the role of music in identifying a culture cannot be over-emphasized. That is, for a person or a group to be identified, it has to show some quality in his or their possession that others do not have, or something that is common to a group or individual that is not related easily with other.

In furthering cultural identity, Encyclopedia of Education (1975,p.432) underlined the role of music in this regard. According to it, a foreigner can immediately understand a 'rag', a 'payote song' or a cante hando', but in effort to learn what such forms of music mean, one is led deep into the subtleties of the culture to which it belongs. For example, when the Beatles added the sound of the sitar to their ensemble, they also added ideas from the religious traditions of India to their own philosophy and the meanings of their songs. What the writer implies here is that sitar is a particular musical instrument associated with Indian culture. Thus meaning that Beatles borrow from it.

In addressing the concept of culture, one will understand why music

becomes a veritable tool for its advancement. For example, when one talks of musical culture of group or society distinct from any other mind is what makes the music of that group or society distinct from any other culture. Music is not always a pure art pursued for its own sake, in many parts of world, it is an integral part of the social life of the people used in such rituals as healings, ritual ceremonies and rites to bring rain, drive evil spirits or witches and to encourage the reproduction of livestock. These functions help define the cultural norms of the people which music amplifies.

To emphasize the role of music in cultural identity, one may x-ray the various musical practices of other cultures. For instance, the smooth, oval vocal style of western singing is not admired in most non-western parts of the world. Rasping, nasal quavering and constricted tones or various combinations of these are considered interesting. Men sometimes sing in falsetto and woman sing bass as though to remind the western world that what they consider natural and universal in vocal pitch may be based on narrow cultural expectation. Now what this implies is that; a cultural practice/ belief have permitted certain musical practices which may be considered wrong, uncivilized by certain parts of the world yet acceptable and delightful to the very society that use it.

Across the entire Islamic world from Iran to North and East Africa, there is a related musical tradition of drums, strings and voice with complex rhythm, a variety of modes, the use of drone, and highly elaborate and improved melodies. Musicians play and sing in unison and in cross rhythm often employing uneven metres such as 7/8 or 5/8 and that is unknown to any other society. This underscores the role of music as catalyst of cultural indicator, (Encyclopedia of Education Vol.6, p.436).

Moreover, the culture of a group can be understood either by the religious or philosophical context of their musical practice which include forms, scale, melodic line, metre, vocal technique or instrumental resource. Sometimes the rendition and performance could also serve as a culture indicator for the musical practice of a given society. For instance, Akpabot (1984) asserts that in Nigeria, trumpets are commonly found and used in Northern Nigeria at the palaces of the Emir, to alert the community of the arrival or exit of the Emir from his domain.

Reference was also made to the musical cultures around the world by Encyclopedia of Education (p436). In it India was recorded to have developed string and vocal arts in which elaborate ornamentation and improvisation are their specialties. Equally important in the style

of this region is the drums, unmatched for complexity, speed and mathematical brilliance. Instruments have also helped in identifying musical culture of various societies. Hundreds of instruments never dreamed of in western Europe such as, sitar, lyre, Goje, kakaki, molo, hourglass drum etc. are in common use in Asia and Africa.

Music is well recognized as a basic social and cultural activity of mankind. Music helps to develop a greater interest in such arts as drama, dance and also a deeper interest and appreciation for the cultural side of life. The Ballard, waltz, sarrsbard, Gigue, Allande which form part of the western Europe folk dance is not appreciated in the African setting- that is why Hopkins (1971) is of the opinion that music is a sort of time machine, enabling us to experience vicariously the emotions and thought of man. This implies that music as an art is rooted in the lives of people and as such always communicate something to the audience.

Another way music has helped in fostering cultural identity is that it deals with musical instruments. Various cultures in the world have been traced and tied to some particular musical instruments. The Aulo and the kithara were used by the Greeks in their religious rites. For example, the Kithara is the instrument of APOLLO. The Apollonians used this instrument in the area of religious and hymnic music. The aulos are associated with the Dionysian cult. The Scottish are known for the sac-bag, sitar is related to the Indians.

In Nigeria, various cultural groups can be identified by the type of musical instruments they use. For example amongst the Ngas people of Plateau State, the sombi of the aerophone is used to accompany their dances during festivals and social occasions. The molo, a nine stringed harp is commonly found amongst the Hausa/Fulani of Northern Nigeria. Equally associated with Hausa/Fulani are the Goje, Alghanta, Shantu and kalangu. Amongst the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria is found musical instruments like Oja (small flute), Ekwe - slit drum. The mere mention of dundun orchestra will turn the reader's mind to the Yoruba people.

Another significant factor of cultural identity expressed by music is that which has to do with the way Africans sing. Cultural practices in Africa reveals that singing style of people is characterized by call and response. African music usually consists of a phrase of two sections sung alternatively by a cator or a leader and the chorus, which may be repeated over and over again. Nowhere in the world is this practice common except in Africa. This closely followed by the scale pattern used only by the Africans. The idea of Tritonic 3, tetratonic 4 and pentatonic scale readily remind the reader of African music, which lay emphasis on African culture. The music of other cultures is a valuable aid in increasing communication and understanding between diverse groups. It also helps to capture the flavour of new experiences in religion, literature and system of thoughts. Music is a veritable aspect of any culture. It is that which enriches the culture of a given society. Music is the social aspect of culture. It sustains culture in various ways; it encompasses knowledge it also serve as a store or reservoir of knowledge, past events, and records -of societal beliefs, values, attitudes and history. In social aspect, music is used to enrich and enliven cultural values like festivals, naming ceremony, birthday, chieftaincy, ceremonies, installation of new King ceremonies, death, farming etc. Without music such events will appear lifeless, dull, unattractive, less rewarding in terms of appreciation, acknowledgement, pleasure and satisfaction. This goes to show that music is an important aspect of culture and the cultural development of any society may be incomplete if the music of that cultural society is not taken into cognizance.

### **How Music Education Has Been Used To Poster Cultural Identity**

Music education is a programme designed to inculcate into the recipient skills, attributes, knowledge of music so that at the end of such programme, the individual should be able to demonstrate certain skills, behaviour, values, beliefs that are adjudged to be relevant to the society where he finds himself and useful to him in living a profitable and a sustaining life. Music education was handled by our primitive ancestors with a clear objective that the youth should be able to carry on ceremonial traditions. Instruction was less vital because there was no school. Indeed there was the ultimate social pressure and unlimited opportunity to achieve the necessary music education in connection with tribal activities. Undoubtedly, effective musical

participation was generally more widely different and diffused in primitive society than has often been the case in civilized communities. However, the musical heritage of many culture by contrast are usually transmitted orally. Young musicians learn by carefully listening, observing, participating and imitating older musicians. This is the immediate concern of music education in Nigeria has adapted new approaches and methodology that is much more effective than previously known.

Firstly, it has brought the music of various people and tunes to the reach of students. Scholars can now find their places in the cultural stream that began in the past and will flow into the future. Music education provides musical knowledge to the younger ones in schools. It seeks to improve the ability of students to create and appreciate their cultural music, to appreciate the aesthetic value of other culture's music, to conceptualize it intelligently and to value it deeply.

Secondly, music education leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills in the music of other culture that may not have been possible because of other limitations that are inherited in ignorance. Such skills when acquired help to enrich their musical life thus fostering cultural unity.

Music education has also helped students of various cultural backgrounds to become aware of the pattern of sound that is contained in the aesthetic components of music of the world around them. This provides experience which will build a favorable music attitude of emotional, social and aesthetic growth in the life of both children and adult. Moreover, it increases such person's capacity to control the availability of aesthetic richness that is in music.

Moreover, music education has helped in the-transformation of the public musical culture not given attention previously into a recognized part of each person's environment. This stimulates the listening capacity of students in judging, valuing and paying undivided attention when listening to music thereby developing wholesome love without discriminating against music of other cultures apart from their own culture.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has been able to establish that culture constitutes a heritage or social tradition of a people. That is the idea, customs, skills of a given society developed over a period of time. Music is an aspect of a culture that seek to integrate the social value of that culture into a lively aesthetic picture that appeals to the mind, emotion and sense of the listener. Music education tries to foster those colourful cultural diversity spread across the globe for the enjoyment, appreciation and awareness of students in Nigerian colleges and schools.

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