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# PATHWAY TO A MORE EFFECTIVE MUSICAL ARTS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: ENGAGING THE MULTICULTURAL LEVER

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Kayode Samuel, Ph.D

## Introduction

My intent in this paper is to challenge major stakeholders in the Nigerian music education industry on the need to leverage on the opportunities presented by the seemingly cataclysmic colonial legacies on Nigeria's educational system and move it to the next level. My approach here would deviate from the usual '*crying over spilt milk*' as I deliberately refrain from tracing our axiomatic history as far as music education in Nigeria is concerned. There is no doubt that it was quite tempting for me to begin to critically x-ray the state of musical arts education in Nigeria from its inception, as I mused within myself that this might prove useful in setting the tone for this solemn assembly of distinguished scholars. I chose, rather, to focus more on the theme of the conference which I believe was primarily organized to discuss and seek pragmatic ways whereby music education could be re-positioned within the entire educational system in the country.

There is no gainsaying that literature is replete with scholars' submissions on how we arrived at where we are today. Several efforts have been devoted to tracing the history and development of music education (or lack of it) in Nigeria (Nzewi, 2001; Okafor, 2005; Omibiyi-Obidike, 2007; Adeogun, 2007; Vidal, 2008; Samuel, 2012; Olorunsogo, 2012) just to mention but a few. As a result, I consider it unnecessary for me to dissipate energy on reminding us to recall what went wrong or by echoing other scholars' distinctive voices on the subject matter, neither is it my interest to attempt to re-invent the wheels under any guise whatsoever. Rather, my objective in this short presentation is to reflect on the past, briefly identify (by way of diagnosis) a few drawbacks in the system and bring up for discussion some workable solutions. This is with the hope of directing the attention of genuinely concerned individuals to take prompt positive action on the topic I have captioned: *Repositioning the Nigerian musical arts education*

system for a more effective delivery: *Engaging the multicultural lever*. The paper, therefore, argues that solutions are right at our doorsteps if all stakeholders gathered here today would leave this place determined to imbibe a set of itemized cultural practices being proposed. I would like to state that now is the time to take affirmative action if we truly desire a positive change.

My thought is hinged on a Yoruba adage: '*a kii fete sile ka maa pa lapalapa*'. A simple translation would be: 'the cure for leprosy must first be sought and applied before proceeding to treat ringworm'. Leprosy is by far a more serious disease compared to ringworm. In other words, we need to get our priority right with regards to the challenges facing music education in Nigeria. This is the second decade of the 21st century and music education and the entire educational system in Nigeria are still faced with multifarious unresolved challenges largely because the teaching and learning of music at the various educational institutions have for a long time been modeled on Western concepts, genres, and pedagogy. On the one hand, Nigerian educators in general are battling the heritage of colonialism with mixed feelings, on the flip of the coin, it is discovered that there have been hues and cries on the need for a revision of the music curriculum, with less emphasis on how to adopt a pragmatic and creative approach to the implementation of the existing curricula. What this suggests is that many musical arts educators seem to have lost the initiative or the right strategic movements to bring about the desired changes.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Perhaps, the starting point for this paper is to call the attention of all and sundry to five keywords contained in the theme of this conference. They are: repositioning, music education, Nigerian system, bi-musicality and multiculturalism. It would be most appropriate therefore to begin with conceptual clarifications.

To **reposition** connotes some form of movement; a shift from one point to another. It could mean to make an adjustment or embark on an alignment with a view to bringing about optimal performance and desired results. More often than not, repositioning is usually proposed to redress some form of dissatisfaction particularly with the status of an item, issue, programme, product or a system. In this context, it might be suggested that as stakeholders in the project 'Nigerian musical arts education', the conference of music educators in Nigeria (COMEN), as a corporate body as well as her individual members are not comfortable with the current state of music education in the country, and after critical reflection have decided to take concrete steps to address or redress

various identified issues regarding its development.

In defining the second keyword (**music education**), since African musical performance and practice are totalitarian in nature, I easily align myself with Nzewi's (2003: 13) viewpoint and thus would adopt the term - musical arts education - instead of music education, which is western-oriented in concept. According to him, in African cultures, there is no distinct separatist posture in the performance arts disciplines of music, dance, drama, poetry and costume. Musical arts, thus, consist of structured sound from sonic (music), aesthetic/poetic stylization of body motion (dance), measures stylization of spoken language (poetry and lyrics), metaphorical reflection of life and cosmos displayed in action (drama) as well as symbolized text and décor embodied in material objects (costume and scenery) As a result, each branch resonates and reinforces the logic, structure, form, shape, mood, texture and character of the other.

The '**Nigerian system**' suggests some form of peculiarity. Under normal circumstances, the efficiency or otherwise of any system is often assessed against globally accepted standards. Many of us are probably familiar with some of the following terms or common sayings: 'proudly Nigerian', 'African time', 'home-grown democracy', 'the Nigerian factor', and so forth. The question which arises from the foregoing is: does it mean that Nigerians have a radically different style of carrying out things in this country? Could it be that our system is so unique that it does not conform to established standards or be of universal applicability? Happily, for the purpose of clarity, terms are expected to be contextualized. Therefore, what is meant here is the manner in which musical arts education operates in Nigeria.

**Bi-musicality** supposes that an individual experiences or benefits from two musical cultures. This usually takes the form of being born into a music culture, for example, being of an Igbo extraction and growing up in a cosmopolitan city like Lagos, thereby getting exposed to Yoruba music culture. Another example is an individual who grew up in a village, but had the opportunity of attending a school where the western-European music tradition was fully operational particularly from childhood as the case of many of us here. Such a person is said to be 'bi-musical' because of the significant influence of both musical cultures leaving an indelible mark on her/him and forming a life-long experience in terms of musical expressions. Vidal (2012: 205) notes that bi-musicalism is a product of bi-culturalism. This is because when individuals are encultured in, trained in and practice musical traditions that belong to two different cultures, they are bi-musical.

It is certainly not out of place in our attempt at defining **multiculturalism** to refer to some of other concepts such as mono-lithic or mono-cultural, bi-cultural, intercultural and multicultural. In Euba (1988), Nketia defined interculturalism as 'the process of identifying with or sharing in the heritage of other cultures with a view to broadening one's cultural horizon or one's capacity to understand and appreciate differences in modes of expression.' Mono simply means one, bi-cultural - two, and more than two would fall within the purview of multiculturalism. Based on the theme of the conference, our concern is music tradition based on two or more cultural experiences.

It is a well established fact that Nigeria is not only multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural, but also a pluralistic society. That is why from the earliest known civilization, each linguistic, ethnic and cultural groups have been practising its own music tradition. As a result, the issue of bi-lingualism, bi-culturalism or even multiculturalism is not experientially strange to us as a people in many respects. Vidal (2012) rightly submits that Nigeria has a tripartite musical and cultural heritage namely, traditional African, Euro-Christian and Islamic-Arabic with a majority of its citizens acquiring and expressing at least two of these in one way or the other. According to him, some (very few) people are still monolithic ethnic traditional-wise. In view of the foregoing, it can be suggested that the Nigerian music education had for a long period been organized on bi-musicalism or multiculturalism.

In terms of its technical usage, the subject of multiculturalism gained much momentum particularly in America towards the end of the 1960s. The political and educational slogan of multiculturalism gained its substance from the Boas-Benedict- and general anthropological-concept of culture just as the following themes prominently featured in conveying multiculturalism as a concept:

First, every person, consciously or unconsciously is a participant in culture and the product of a particular culture. The vision is of a one-to-one relationship between that individual and culture. Secondly, in the light of the foregoing (that the child at school age is already a participant in a culture and a product of that culture), it follows that if schooling is to be humane and efficient, it should begin at that point, reaching toward the child in her or his local culture. It should not assume that the child is ignorant or the child's psyche is a vacuum because s/he is unfamiliar with some aspects of the dominant culture. On the third level, the culture of the school is expected to reflect the population of the school rather than simply reflecting and reproducing the characteristics. Finally, the curriculum should be designed to deal with the child at the point of entry into formal



education.

As far back as 1973/1974, Omibiya had proposed a model to the study of African music as well as any other non-Western musical culture for primary school pupils and which could also be extended to high school students. The model is based on concept clusters abstracted from the field of ethnomusicology with the basic assumption that every discipline has certain organising concepts, key ideas and modes of inquiry developed by scholars and are considered to be fundamental to their fields. (See figure 1 : Omibiya's model)

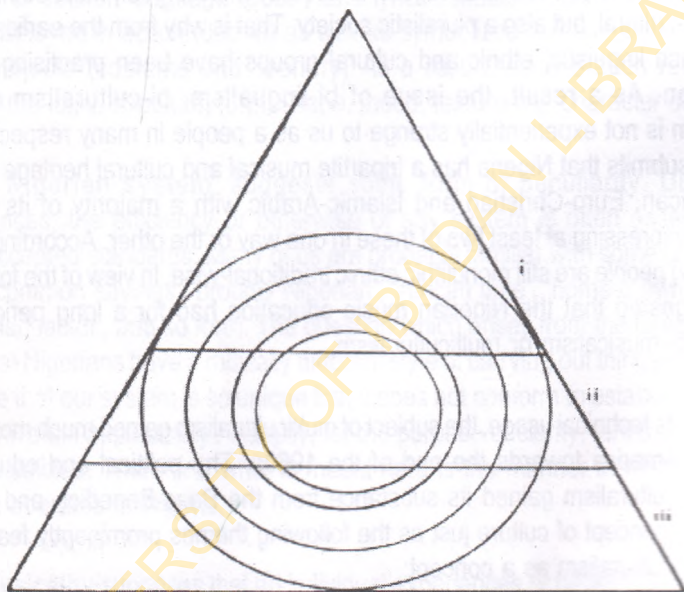


Fig. 1 Model of African music curriculum

**CONCENTRIC:**  
 1 = Locale, i.e. ethnic oriented music practices  
 2 = National, i.e. music practices viewed at the national level  
 3 = African, i.e. representative countries  
 4 = World, i.e. musical cultures of the world

**TRIANGULAR:** i = Culture ii = Performance iii = Structure

There are two parts to the model as presented in Fig. 1 above. The concentric part represents the scope and geographic distribution of musical phenomena to be covered, while the triangular part represents the concepts to be learned in relation to, or in the context of the areas named in the concentric section. In other words, the concentric part (concrete content of knowledge) relates to the necessary resources to be used in the

triangular part (abstract comprehension and inquiry). The various parts of the model are interrelated and are arranged from the most specific to the most general.

According to Omibiyi, the concentric section which deals with knowledge of the outer circles is based on knowledge of the inner ones. However, this process is reversed in the triangular section where the movement is from top to bottom or from high to low. As a result, the knowledge of the lower level is based on that of the higher one in a progressive manner without necessarily precluding simultaneous teaching of facts relating to all the levels, neither does each band in the concentric part correspond to educational level. Furthermore, in interpreting the model, the concentric part is arranged by placing the concept 'locale' in the inner-most part of the circle because it is the most specific in terms of content coverage of any programme of music education. This means that local musical practices will be covered first and will probably be used as points of departure for musical practices of other areas. It is evident from the foregoing that representative ethnic-oriented musical practices of a locality form the basis of the music programme presented in the model.

In conclusion, Omibiyi while making reference to Seeger (1941) avers that charity must begin at home. Accordingly, it is essential for every child to be inducted into the grammatical and syntactical components of the language of their musical culture before they reach the critical age of twelve. By so doing, the young learner would be led into the understanding of their musical tradition in order to develop the right attitudes towards it and also to provide a basis for the study of other musics of the world.

Having drawn a mind map of all the foregoing keywords, I shall proceed to briefly consider in the following section, the current music educational system, using the NCE programme as an example. This section could appropriately be described 'once-an-insider's appraisal' of music programme in the Nigerian colleges of education (COEs). The reasons for choosing COEs are not farfetched: it would provide some insight into the state of music education as a whole considering that the teaching and learning of music at this level is critical since the products of COEs are responsible for laying the foundation for music at the basic level of education. It is upon this foundation that the blocks of the main building are built. The strength, durability and effectiveness of any building structure are determined essentially by the quality of its foundation. Our elders in my culture have a saying: '*Amukun, eru re wo, O ni isale ni ki e wo*', meaning 'the poorly shaped-legged individual would want his critics' comments about the misaligned position of the load he is carrying linked to where his predicament clearly lies, which in

this case is the state of his feet'.

## The NCE programme

Until recently, many COEs were running the music programme as double major. This means that two-thirds of the period was devoted to music courses. In spite of this, there had been much criticism of the programme in terms of its outputs especially with respect to the competence of the products of COEs in meeting societal expectations (Samuel, 2006). However, the programme has now been scaled down and forced to acquire a single major status (one-third) across all colleges by the Nigerian Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). The implication is that similar music contents are listed in the curriculum, but lesser number of hours is required to teach them. It would be rhetorical to ask what the current outcome would be. A probable benefit on the part of lecturers/trainers-of-trainers in these COEs would be less workload which any of them could take advantage of to embark on higher degree programme or engage in research activities to enhance their productivity and also extend the frontiers of knowledge, which could be re-channeled into the educational system.

Another issue has to do with the NCE music products who are now certified teachers. Many of them settle for teaching jobs at primary and secondary schools. In the light of the current educational programme in Nigeria at the basic level, music (formerly as a subject) has become subsumed under the integrated arts and labelled Creative and Cultural Arts (CCA) programme. It has become more compelling for musical arts educators to refocus, re-examine and re-align their strategies in order to ensure effective delivery of the objectives of the programme. Elsewhere (Samuel, 2012), we advocated for a better understanding on the part of music teachers, development of right attitude and right approach to programme implementation of music education in the country. This is because quite a large number of the CCA teachers have remained monolithic in their teaching approach. In addition, many are ill-prepared and limited in the requisite knowledge (technical and methodological) to effectively deliver on the set objectives of the approved programme. These facts have emanated from the teachers themselves as expressed in their frustrations of the CCA programme with some outrightly condemning it as 'inappropriate' because music components have been subsumed under the integrated arts. It is however a fact that every dynamic teacher must be amenable to change, willing to adapt, and also possess capacity to creatively respond to challenges brought about by reason of any change in the system.

Conflating the reasoning of the two last paragraphs, the critical issue that we have to face then is that those who ought to lay the foundation for music education at the basic level have turned out to become 'ignorant experts' - in Nzewi's (2011) sense of the term. Many of them lack the capacity to inadequately fit into their newly defined roles. NCE graduates are trained to acquire competencies strictly in music, with virtually no exposure in the other complementary components that make up the CCA programme which they are enlisted to handle. Apart from this, many lack the exposure to other culture besides their own 'roots'.

### **Engaging the seven-gear 'multi'cultural lever**

It is instructive to note that solutions to the challenges identified here, alongside other scholars' presentations whether at this conference or by earlier scholars lie not in a parochial mono-lithic approach. Rather, an adoption of a firm, consistent and all embracing multicultural dimension. As the saying goes: 'no one is an island unto himself', there is the need to combat the challenges on a multi-lever basis since it is quite evident that existing models cannot fully support or sustain contemporary musical arts education realities. As opposed to the usage of the term 'multicultural' in its strict technical sense, I have taken the liberty to present seven (7) vital cultures which I consider most beneficial in an attempt to re-position the Nigerian music education for a better and a more effective delivery. As expected, every known culture evolves gradually. In other words, what is being advocated in this paper is a paradigm shift through major knowledge revolutions. This position is based on Burrell and Morgan's (1979) sociology of radical change especially if indeed we are dissatisfied with the status quo and desire change in this modern society.

- 1) **Digital age culture:** This is information and communication technology based. Any educational endeavour that is not technologically driven particularly in this age would not only be limited, but lacking in many respects. There exist quite a number of educational software packages which can facilitate better teaching and learning of musical arts. Samuel (2012) identified the following amongst others as the benefits of the digital technology on African music: promotion of E-learning of music in educational institutions in Africa, facilitation of research through documentation/preservation of culture music – aided by archival and retrieval of information, conservation of space for storage of music data, and production of neater and print-ready copies of musical works by composers through various music software thereby increasing their acceptability worldwide. In addition, communication between individuals, organizations and countries has been greatly improved and made

faster through access to the Internet. It is most certain that the benefits which could be derived from Internet-based learning by far outweigh its drawbacks, most especially when its users take adequate steps to minimize some of the inherent risks and challenges.

- 2) **True academic culture:** Stakeholders and scholars in every sense of the word are expected to imbibe and exhibit true academic culture. In the discharge of this duty, we must assiduously aim for excellence, engage in collaboration (rather than unhealthy competition) with professional colleagues, and embark on regular training and re-training programme to keep abreast with latest information ranging from theoretical to epistemological and methodological issues in the field of music education. We cannot but laboriously carry out well-thought out and properly designed evidence-based researches both in music education and ethnomusicology. Such studies should cover a wide spectrum of music area making it multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and not restricted to those found in individual's immediate environment. In addition, we must seek numerous opportunities for funding from philanthropic organizations to conduct intervention studies geared towards redressing identified challenges confronting music education in the country. A true academic would always seek to proffer workable solutions; strive to ensure that research findings are not only practicable but also shared at conferences both locally and internationally. In addition, as the think-tank and knowledge production agents of the society, committed scholars would never rest on their oars until concrete steps are taken to ensure implementations of the various research findings for the benefit of their community and the nation at large. Such kindred intellectual minds also often encourage one another through mutually beneficial partnership and mentoring programmes with a view to raising the next generation of music scholars thereby ensuring continuity in the system.
- 3) **Culture of Association:** Closely knitted to academic culture is the culture of association. This takes the form of building personal networks with professional colleagues at local, regional and international levels. Regular attendance and active participation at academic conferences, seminars, training workshops and so forth. The African principle of togetherness as clearly expressed in the numerous African proverbs encourages this culture. Samuel (2012) observed that there is a little awareness among music teachers particularly at the basic education level (primary and secondary schools) of the existence of national professional music bodies and associations including COMEN and the Association of Nigerian Musicologists (ANIM) as well as their international counterparts such as the Pan African Society

for Musical Arts Educators (PASMAE) and the International Society for Music Education (ISME). In the light of the above, I wish to recommend to COMEN to shove up her membership drive by extending invitation to potential members as well as encourage individuals involved in teaching music across all levels to come on board. When they join the train, our voices would resonate at *fortissimo* level. Together, we can attract the attention of the government and other stakeholders particularly at policy making level to effect the desired change. I have no doubt that we can, if we are committed to these ideals. In addition, COMEN should spearhead and facilitate training workshops on regular basis targeted at building the capacity and improving technical competencies of her members at various levels. Besides the annual conferences, we need avenues whereby musical arts educators and professional colleagues could meet to share research findings and learn about new developments in their field of study. Through constant interactions, more musical arts educators would be motivated, and become better enlightened about the prospects of pursuing higher degrees in universities both home and abroad.

- 4) Culture of 'add ons': Studies have revealed that one of the daunting challenges facing musical arts education in Nigeria is more situated with implementation rather than inappropriate curriculum. In reference to the issue of Nigerian system as contained in the theme of this conference, the argument subsists that more often than not, it is not official documents such the Nigerian constitution, extant laws and Acts of the parliament that are actually defective. Most times, it is the lack of will on the part of the implementers and various organs/institutions/personnel that are largely responsible for systemic failure at various levels in the country. In terms of the music curriculum, in many instances, some implementers especially at tertiary institution level erroneously believe and act as if the contents of music curriculum are 'cast in iron'; hence they remained sacrosanct and should not be altered. As far as those who strongly hold this position are concerned, it would tantamount to committing an unpardonable sin to even attempt to introduce any extraneous components outside those specified in the written curriculum. Such additions, according to them, simply have no place and must be excluded. It is however my humble submission that the content of the curriculum (as clearly stated) represents the minimum standard. Therefore, useful and important 'additions' both in intent and content considered beneficial to music learners could be included with some measure of caution especially if they would be well taught and could be entertained in the lecture timetable. For instance, music students especially at tertiary level should be encouraged to own personal laptops/computers containing music software and guided to make use of them especially in music theory or relate

courses even though no such course code or title existed. Since the official document did not prescribe a limit for the maximum standard attainable, the teacher would simply be enriching the content of the programme. It goes without saying therefore that lecturers/teachers should also be well versed in the utilization of computer-aided mode of learning in music in order to be competent and efficient facilitator should such a course be included.

- 5) Culture of building bridges and not walls: If any meaningful positive changes must occur as we desire, there is the need for a soul searching by many of our colleagues. Every barrier separating one professional musical arts educator from his/her colleagues especially at workplace must be broken. The time has come to take the bull by the horns and address this hydra-headed monster which had presented itself in form of unhealthy rivalry between colleagues and sheer petty jealousy. There is no gain saying that many music department in our institutions of learning have been polarized; bad blood have been bred in some through factionalization of members of staff and students along different divides. The cases in some departments of music have degenerated to such a point that it is indeed ironical that the concept of concordant harmony is only being taught, but not put to practice. Some individuals care very little about the consequences of their actions on the teaching and learning of music, just as it is evident that some display lack of interest in improving music programme in their schools. It is also unbecoming of some others to engage in open display of 'power' and/or arrogance either as the head or a senior colleague without duly considering the effects of their actions on both the programme and their students. In the same vein, there exist some individuals whose uncooperative attitude is not only detestable but condemnable, and still, some others devote much energy to playing dirty politics instead of playing music, thereby sabotaging the entire system. If we honestly desire to see a re-positioning of things for better performance, then all warring parties must be prepared to sheath their sword and doggedly work towards putting an end to such unwholesome practices. We must embrace a new culture of building bridges, forgiving and accepting one another, and working harmoniously for the progress of this noble profession. On a positive note, it is heart-warming to state that COMEN has consistently maintained a good and harmonious working relationship with her counterpart - the Association of Nigerian Musicologists (ANIM) – and as partners in progress toiling ceaselessly for the development of the music profession in the country. This culture should be sustained, and may I also add that both bodies including their leadership and members at large need to identify and explore other areas to strengthen the coalition.

- 6) Culture of full commitment to the musical arts education profession: The period of paying lip service to music education is now over. All and sundry, the young and the old, both male and female must join hands to play their role wholeheartedly. As the saying goes: *'igba eke ni n'owo t'ile, igba alaamu, ni n'owo t'ogiri'* (in togetherness lies our strength). Now is the time to forge a common front and if need be, sponsor and support well recognized and highly committed members of our profession with political ambition to occupy strategic positions and use their stewardship of influence to bring about positive changes and better the lot of our profession. Many brilliant and well-thought out ideas, and solutions proffered at academic conferences such as would emanate from this year's COMEN meeting as well as findings and recommendations from several researches carried out and presented in form of reports, dissertations and theses are stored up in dusty library shelves in our educational institutions. Except pragmatic steps are taken to transform these brilliant findings into policies for action, they would remain mere wishes never to see the light of the day. Recommendations from these researches would require high powered delegations of appointed/elected members into positions of authorities at various levels to ensure translation into positive policies before we can move to the realm of implementations. The type of politics we expect our members to engage in is head-hunting for highly qualified and quality persons who would passionately push for the change we all have been clamouring for. When courageous and strong representatives are supported to get to positions of influence, policies which are inimical to the progress of music education and negative agenda responsible for relegating musical arts education to the background can be reversed.
- 7) Culture of strengthening existing functional structures and erecting new ones: In order to solidify the present system, we wish to humbly borrow some wisdom from our elders especially as in reference to many of their ever-green suggestions. It is instructive to note that pertinent questions which Vidal - a revered Professor of musicology posed to a similar gathering of scholars at ANIM conference almost a decade ago are still unanswered today. Many of his recommendations are yet to be implemented. Or else why should the state of music education remain what it is? Vidal (2008) identified fallen standards of music education in Nigeria and demanded to know its philosophy for the 21st century. He expressed great concern over a growing population of urban youths whom he described as cultural eunuchs who are being culturally emasculated in their culture. As part of his recommendations, Vidal stressed the need for a change in our over-formalized education system, which had not made Nigerian music graduates flexible enough to be job creators



but job seekers. Since music is a socio-cultural phenomenon, he advocated for the promotion of cross-cultural music interactions geared towards developing a national idiom of music and fostering a spirit of national identity. One practical way of achieving this is for COMEN to organize music festivals annually for music departments at tertiary institutional level from different geo-political zones in the country.

## Conclusion

An attempt was made in this paper to present a pathway to ensure Nigeria's musical arts education system is repositioned to make it more effective. First, it probed the main gap in the system before proffering a seven (multi) point cultural agenda to be pursued. The paper enjoined all stakeholders of musical arts education to actively play their parts individually and corporately so as to ensure that the present gains are sustained, while lost grounds are substantially reclaimed. On a final note, it is our hope that the majority of the long-age challenges facing music education in Nigeria would soon become outdated as we brace up for newer ones particularly in this modern age.

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