
TRENDS IN MUSIC CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Music in Nigeria serves as a vital medium for cultural expression, identity, moral education, and nation-building, yet its formal instruction has historically struggled with a legacy of Western-centric models. This paper examines contemporary trends, opportunities, and systemic challenges shaping music curriculum development in Nigeria. Key developments include national policy alignment under the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum, ongoing efforts to indigenize and decolonize music content, the integration of digital music technology to foster entrepreneurship and employability, and a shift toward applied, community-based learning. The paper employs a qualitative literature review design to examine trends in music curriculum development in Nigeria. The result reveals that the effective enactment of these reforms is severely constrained by structural persistent barriers, including chronic underfunding, the marginalization of music within broader Creative and Cultural Arts (CCA) frameworks, inadequate physical infrastructure, and a shortage of specialized, dual-competency music educators. The study concludes that fulfilling the educational, cultural, and economic potential of Nigeria's music curriculum requires bridging the policy-practice gap through sustained funding, localized learning materials, targeted teacher training, and active partnerships between schools and local artistic communities.*

Keywords: *Music Education, Curriculum Development, Indigenization, NERDC Framework, Music Technology, Nigeria Education Reform.*

Introduction

Music occupies important place in the Nigerian society. It serves as a means of cultural expression, identity formation, moral education, and social interaction. In many Nigerian communities, musical activities are closely associated with ceremonies,

festivals, religious practices, storytelling, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. Through singing, dancing, and instrumental performance, younger generations acquire knowledge of their cultural heritage (Agu, 2016). This close relationship between music and social life makes music education an important aspect of the Nigerian educational system. Music education in Nigeria has developed through the interaction of indigenous musical traditions and formal educational practices introduced during the colonial period. Missionary and colonial education contributed to the establishment of formal music instruction, but Western musical practices became prominent in many schools. This development created a need to examine the relationship between formal music education and the musical experiences of Nigerian learners. Following independence, scholars and educators increasingly advocated the inclusion of indigenous musical knowledge and practices in the curriculum (Adeogun, 2015; Ajewole, 2014).

The development of music curriculum has also been influenced by national educational reforms. Music has been included within the Creative and Cultural Arts framework at the basic education level, creating opportunities for learners to acquire musical knowledge and practical skills (Agu, 2016). However, the inclusion of music in curriculum documents does not necessarily guarantee effective implementation. The availability of qualified teachers, instructional materials, instruments, and adequate teaching time remains important to the achievement of curriculum objectives (Adeogun, 2015). Contemporary developments have further increased the need to examine music curriculum in Nigeria. The growing importance of indigenous music, digital technology, entrepreneurship, and practical learning has created new demands on music education. A relevant curriculum must therefore respond to the cultural realities of Nigerian learners while preparing them for changing educational and professional opportunities (Adeogun, 2021).

This article examines trends in music curriculum development in Nigeria, with particular attention to its historical development, contemporary changes, implementation challenges, and prospects. Specifically, it seeks to:

- i. examine the historical development of music curriculum in Nigeria;
- ii. discuss major trends shaping contemporary music curriculum development;
- iii. examine the challenges affecting the implementation of music curriculum reforms; and
- iv. consider the prospects for improving music education through culturally relevant content, effective teacher preparation, and appropriate educational resources.

This paper adopts a qualitative literature review design to examine trends in music curriculum development in Nigeria. The study draws on published scholarly

works, books, journal articles, and relevant educational policy documents relating to music education, curriculum development, indigenous music, teacher education, and educational reforms in Nigeria. It also utilizes a thematic approach to analyse the selected literature with attention on the historical development of music education, curriculum content, indigenisation, teacher preparation, music technology, and the challenges affecting curriculum implementation. It argues that effective curriculum development requires a balance between cultural relevance, practical musical skills, appropriate technology, and adequate teacher preparation. The paper is significant because it contributes to the discussion of music education as an important component of cultural and educational development in Nigeria. It also provides a basis for understanding the relationship between curriculum policy and classroom practice and the need for reforms that respond to the changing needs of Nigerian learners.

Stating the Problem

The development of music education in Nigeria has been accompanied by important changes in curriculum policy, educational institutions, and approaches to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the existence of curriculum documents does not necessarily mean that music education is effectively implemented in schools. The historical influence of Western educational models, the continuing need for indigenous content, inadequate instructional resources, and challenges in teacher preparation have created difficulties in achieving the objectives of music education. The problem is further complicated by the changing demands of contemporary music practice.

Learners are expected to understand musical traditions while also acquiring practical, creative, and technological skills that can prepare them for participation in modern society. Where curriculum content, teacher preparation, instructional resources, and classroom practices do not respond to these demands, music education may fail to achieve its cultural and educational purposes. This paper therefore examines the major trends in music curriculum development in Nigeria and considers the extent to which these trends respond to the needs of Nigerian learners and the wider society. It also examines the challenges that may limit the effective implementation of curriculum reforms and identifies prospects for strengthening music education.

Conceptual Clarification

Music education

Music education is the process through which individuals acquire musical knowledge, skills, values, and experiences. It involves activities such as singing, instrumental performance, listening, composition, and the study of musical concepts.

Music education may take place through formal instruction in schools and colleges or through participation in the musical activities of families and communities. In Nigeria, music education has developed through the interaction of indigenous musical traditions and formal educational systems. Adeogun (2015; cf. Agu, 2016) explains that Nigerian communities possess established indigenous systems of music education, including apprenticeship, initiation, and participation in community musical activities. These systems provide important foundations for understanding how musical knowledge is transmitted within Nigerian society.

Formal music education, however, has been influenced by Western educational models. Adeogun (2018) observes that the historical development of music education in Nigeria involved the interaction of indigenous African, Islamic, and Euro-American educational systems. This historical background is important because it helps to explain the continuing discussion about the content and direction of music education in Nigerian schools. Music education should therefore be understood as both a process of musical learning and a means of cultural development. Its effectiveness depends on the relationship between the knowledge being taught, the methods of instruction, and the experiences of learners.

Curriculum

Curriculum refers to the organised content, learning experiences, objectives, teaching activities, and assessment procedures provided within an educational programme. It establishes what learners are expected to know and the skills they are expected to develop. Ajewole (2014) examines curriculum development in Nigerian music education by discussing the meaning of curriculum, its relationship with syllabus, and the major elements involved in curriculum planning. His study also considers the teaching of singing, theory, instruments, rhythm, listening, history, and creative activities within the national music curriculum for junior secondary schools. Curriculum is therefore more than a list of subjects or topics (cf. Nworgu, 2018). It includes the experiences through which educational objectives are achieved. In music education, these experiences involve both theoretical knowledge and practical activities.

Music curriculum development

Music curriculum development refers to the process of planning, designing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the content and learning experiences through which music is taught. It includes decisions about musical knowledge, performance activities, teaching methods, instructional materials, and assessment. Ajewole (2014) demonstrates the importance of examining curriculum content and pedagogical approaches in Nigerian music education. This shows that curriculum development involves not only the selection of musical topics but also the methods through which learners acquire and apply musical knowledge.

The development of a music curriculum must respond to the educational objectives of society and the musical experiences of learners (Nworgu, 2018). Adeogun (2015) argues for a socioculturally sensitive music teacher education curriculum in Nigeria. His argument is relevant to curriculum development because teachers require appropriate knowledge and pedagogical skills to implement the curriculum effectively. Music curriculum development is consequently a continuous process. Changes in educational policy, musical practice, cultural expectations, and technology may require the revision of curriculum content and teaching methods.

Indigenous music education

Indigenous music education refers to the transmission and acquisition of musical knowledge, skills, values, and practices within a particular cultural community. It commonly involves observation, imitation, participation, oral instruction, and practical involvement in musical activities. Adeogun (2015) identifies apprenticeship systems, initiation schools, and music borrowing practices as important elements of indigenous music education in Nigerian communities. These practices demonstrate that musical learning can take place through sustained participation in community life rather than only through classroom instruction (Nworgu, 2018). Indigenous music education is important to the development of a relevant Nigerian music curriculum because it provides knowledge of local musical forms, instruments, performance practices, and cultural values. Adeogun (2018; cf. Agu, 2016) further explains that Nigerian music education has been shaped by the interaction of indigenous African, Islamic, and Euro-American systems. The inclusion of indigenous musical knowledge in formal education must therefore be understood within this wider historical relationship.

Curriculum indigenisation

Curriculum indigenisation refers to the process of adapting educational content, teaching methods, and learning experiences to reflect the cultural realities and educational needs of a particular society. In music education, curriculum indigenisation involves giving appropriate attention to indigenous musical traditions while recognising the educational value of other musical systems. It is concerned with the relationship between musical knowledge and the cultural environment in which learning takes place. Adeogun (2021) argues that decolonising university music education in Nigeria requires critical engagement with different systems of musical knowledge. His position supports the need for a music curriculum that recognises indigenous African musical knowledge rather than treating Western classical music as the only important foundation of formal instruction.

Curriculum indigenisation does not necessarily mean the exclusion of Western music. Rather, it calls for a more balanced approach in which indigenous musical

traditions, Western music, and other relevant musical practices are considered within the educational needs of Nigerian learners. The concepts discussed in this section provide the foundation for understanding music curriculum development in Nigeria. Music education involves the acquisition of musical knowledge and skills, while curriculum provides the organised framework for learning. Music curriculum development concerns the continuous improvement of this framework (Okafor, 2005). Indigenous music education and curriculum indigenisation are particularly important because they draw attention to the relationship between formal music education and the cultural realities of Nigerian society.

Trends in Music Curriculum Development in Nigeria

Music education in Nigeria has undergone significant shifts over the past decades, shaped by competing imperatives: the desire to preserve indigenous musical cultures, the legacy of Euro-American Conservatory models, the practical pressures of limited resources, and recent calls to align curricula with national development goals (Okafor, 2005). Several interrelated trends dominate contemporary curriculum discourse: (1) curriculum reform and policy alignment with the NERDC 9-Year Basic Education framework, (2) indigenization and contextualization of music content, (3) the marginalization of music in school timetables and funding priorities, (4) the rapid integration of music technology and skills for employability, and (5) renewed advocacy for teacher training, professionalization, and curriculum relevance. Each trend interacts with the others and helps explain the current state of music teaching and learning across Nigerian schools and tertiary institutions.

Policy reform and alignment with national curriculum frameworks

A major trend in recent years is the alignment of music education with the NERDC-led Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) and the 9-Year Basic Education initiative. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has published schemes of work that explicitly include music within the Lower, Middle and Upper Basic levels, signalling a policy intention to mainstream music as a core component of basic education (NERDC, 2019). This policy positioning creates a framework for standardized objectives, learning outcomes, and resources across states. However, scholars caution that while these national frameworks are important, their translation into effective practice depends on state and local education authorities' commitment, budgetary allocations, and teacher supply (NERDC, 2019; Olisaeke, 2019).

Indigenization and curriculum contextualization

Curriculum scholars and music educators in Nigeria have pushed for the decolonization and contextualization of music curricula, insisting that classroom music

should reflect indigenous musical forms, languages, and pedagogies rather than privileging Western classical models alone. Historical reviews of music education note how formal instruction originally adopted Euro-American paradigms, producing a disjunction between school music and community musical life; contemporary reformists therefore argue for rooting curriculum content in Nigerian musical cultures to enhance relevance and cultural continuity (Olisaeke, 2019; Okafor, 2005). Several authors propose curricula that make local repertoire, performance practices, and indigenous instruments central to learning outcomes so that students develop both musical literacy and cultural identity (Olisaeke & Davou, 2020).

Marginalization, time-tabling and funding constraints

Despite formal policy recognition, music often remains marginalized in practice. At primary and secondary levels, music is frequently subsumed under broader "Creative and Cultural Arts" (CCA) subjects or allocated minimal instructional time, while state and LGA budgets tend to prioritize examinable "core" subjects (English, Mathematics, Sciences). Empirical studies from Delta State and other regions document chronic underfunding, inadequate music rooms, and few specialist teachers' conditions that severely limit curriculum enactment and student outcomes (Nmadu & Onwuekwe, 2017; cf. Okafor, 2005). The effect is a persistent policy-practice gap: robust national documents exist, but local implementation is uneven and under-resourced.

A prominent recent trend is the push to incorporate music technology (digital audio workstations, recording software, synthesis, and online distribution) into curricula particularly at tertiary and teacher-training levels. Advocates argue that music technology enhances pedagogy, creates pathways for youth entrepreneurship, and connects students to the contemporary music industry (Nmadu & Onwuekwe, 2017). This trend aligns with broader national development agendas that stress skills, employability, and economic sustainability; reformers therefore argue that curriculum content should teach practical studio skills, music business literacy, and creative enterprise alongside traditional musicianship (Olisaeke & Davou, 2020).

Teacher training, professionalization and curriculum capacity building

Concerns over teacher supply and competence have driven a renewed focus on professional development. Many studies note that even where curricula are well designed, insufficient numbers of qualified music teachers undermine delivery. This has encouraged universities, colleges of education, and state ministries to develop in-service training, workshops, and certification routes for music teachers. The call is for teachers who can both read music and teach by oral/participatory methods suited to Nigerian musical cultures—a dual competency rarely found in abundance (Olisaeke,

2019; Lo-Bamijoko, 1990/2021). Strengthening teacher education is therefore central to curriculum renewal.

Curriculum Content Shifts: Theory to Applied and Community-Based Learning

There is a discernible shift from overly theoretical curricula toward applied, participatory, and community-based approaches. Scholars argue that classroom music should incorporate community fieldwork, indigenous performance practice, and collaborative projects with local artists and ensembles. Such pedagogies not only build practical skills but also reconnect schools with living musical traditions, enabling curriculum aims (cultural preservation, creativity, and social cohesion) to be met in authentic ways (Agawu 1992). This trend also supports cross-disciplinary learning linking music to language, history, and social studies.

Challenges and Prospects of Music Curriculum Development in Nigeria

Despite the developments recorded in music curriculum planning in Nigeria, several challenges continue to affect the effective implementation of music education. One major challenge is inadequate funding. Music education requires instruments, rehearsal spaces, recording facilities, instructional materials and trained personnel. However, many schools lack the resources necessary for practical music instruction. Where instruments are available, they may be insufficient for the number of students or may be in poor condition. (Omojola, 2012) This situation limits students' opportunities to develop practical skills and reduces music education to theoretical classroom activities. Another challenge is the marginal position of music within the school curriculum. Although music is included in the Cultural and Creative Arts programme at the basic education level, it is sometimes treated as less important than subjects perceived to be directly connected with examination success or employment. In some schools, music periods are used for other activities, while music teachers are assigned duties outside their areas of specialisation. Such practices weaken the status of the subject and affect students' interest in music education.

The preparation of music teachers also remains a major concern. Effective music teaching requires more than knowledge of musical theory. Teachers should possess practical competence in singing, instrumental performance, composition, technology and the use of indigenous musical resources (Agu, 2016). They should also be able to connect classroom instruction with the cultural experiences of learners. However, inadequate professional development and limited access to modern teaching facilities may prevent teachers from responding effectively to changing curriculum demands. The integration of indigenous music into the curriculum presents another challenge. Although Nigerian music education has increasingly recognised the importance of

local musical traditions, Western musical notation, instruments and teaching methods still occupy a dominant position in many institutions. Indigenous music is sometimes presented as an additional topic rather than as a central source of musical knowledge (Okafor, 2005). This weakens the relationship between music education and the cultural identity of learners. A balanced curriculum should therefore recognise indigenous musical practices as valuable educational resources rather than as materials of secondary importance.

Digital technology also creates both opportunities and challenges. Music software, online tutorials, digital recording platforms and electronic instruments can improve teaching and learning. Nevertheless, unequal access to electricity, computers, internet services and digital equipment limits the use of technology in many schools. Teachers may also require additional training before they can integrate digital tools meaningfully into classroom instruction. Technology should therefore be introduced alongside adequate infrastructure and continuous teacher development. Despite these challenges, the prospects for music curriculum development in Nigeria remain encouraging. One important prospect is the growing recognition of the relationship between music education, cultural identity and national development (Omojola, 2012). Music can support creativity, discipline, collaboration, communication and cultural understanding. It can also provide opportunities in performance, teaching, media production, entertainment, music technology, cultural tourism and arts administration.

The curriculum can be strengthened through the systematic inclusion of Nigerian musical traditions from different ethnic communities. Indigenous songs, instruments, dances, performance practices and musical histories should be selected according to their educational value and presented in ways that encourage respect for cultural diversity. Such an approach would make music education more relevant to learners and would help preserve musical knowledge that might otherwise be lost. Another prospect lies in stronger cooperation between schools, universities, cultural institutions, professional musicians and local communities. Community musicians can serve as resource persons, while schools can provide opportunities for students to observe and participate in musical performances. Universities and colleges of education can support curriculum innovation through research, teacher training and the development of instructional materials.

There is also a need to connect music curriculum more closely with contemporary creative industries. Students should be introduced to basic skills in music production, sound recording, event management, copyright awareness, entrepreneurship and digital distribution. Such content would help learners understand that music education is not limited to classroom teaching or stage performance but can also support self-employment and participation in the wider

creative economy. The future of music curriculum development in Nigeria will therefore depend on the ability of curriculum planners and educational authorities to combine cultural relevance with contemporary knowledge. A strong curriculum should preserve indigenous musical traditions, respond to technological change, develop practical competence and prepare learners for further education and employment. Curriculum reform should be supported by adequate funding, effective supervision, relevant teacher education and regular evaluation.

Conclusion

This study examined major trends in music curriculum development in Nigeria. The discussion showed that music education has moved from a largely inherited and Western-oriented structure towards a more diversified curriculum that recognises indigenous musical traditions, practical learning, digital technology and the changing needs of society. The development of the national curriculum, the inclusion of music in Cultural and Creative Arts, the growing interest in indigenous music and the increasing use of technology have contributed to the changing direction of music education in Nigeria. However, the progress recorded in curriculum development has not always been matched by effective implementation. Inadequate funding, insufficient instruments, poor facilities, limited teacher preparation, weak policy implementation and the marginalisation of music in some schools continue to affect the quality of music education.

The success of future curriculum reforms will depend on the extent to which these challenges are addressed. Music curriculum development in Nigeria should be culturally relevant, practically oriented, technologically responsive and connected with the creative economy. Music education should not be treated merely as an entertainment activity or as a minor school subject. It should be recognised as an important part of national education because of its contribution to cultural preservation, creativity, social development and economic participation.

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Schools should be provided with adequate musical instruments, rehearsal spaces, instructional materials, electricity and other facilities required for effective practical instruction.
2. Nigeria indigenous songs, instruments, dances, performance practices and musical histories should be integrated into teaching in ways that reflect the cultural backgrounds of learners.
3. Training should cover practical musicianship, indigenous music pedagogy, curriculum implementation, digital music technology and creative entrepreneurship.

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4. Students should participate in school ensembles, performances, workshops, festivals and community music activities so that classroom knowledge can be connected with real musical experiences.
 5. Curriculum planners should include basic knowledge of music production, recording, event management, copyright, digital distribution and entrepreneurship.

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