

**TRADITIONAL MUSIC EDUCATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, THE  
IGBO CHILD EXPERIENCE**

**IBEKWE EUNICE U.**

Department of Music  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
Email: eunyamaka@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

In Africa, Music is believed to be one of the most effective ways of achieving positive life expectations. It is also a way of propagating and perpetuating traditions, norms and values. The Igbo harness these advantages by starting early in life to inculcate musical training into their children. Unfortunately, this effort has grossly depreciated. It becomes so glaring that the once cherished legacy/tradition is now fast disappearing probably on account of non-challancy *vis-a-vis* exotic cultural influences. Admittedly, children are the future hope of any nation, if they are not well trained or given good foundation, the nation's development will be at stake. This paper therefore, takes a look on the need for child's early instruction on traditional music which provides the necessary ingredients for positive growth. It seeks to address issues on the child's existing physical and socio-cultural factors which constitute as well as provide enabling ground for musical learning to take place. It goes further to look into factors that militate against traditional musical training of the Igbo child and suggest ways of improving the situation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Before this present age of technological explosion, cultural training of the Igbo child was considered paramount. Children start early in life to learn the values of the society. Among other activities that help to shape, mould and reform character, traditional music plays the greatest part. It is functional; richly imbued with societal ethics, norms and values. It is this functional aspect that makes it most relevant in the society. Okafor (2005:45) notes that "the Igbo child is a product of nature and nurture". The role of traditional music in nurturing the Igbo child is given exposition in various musical activities engaged by children at different stages of development. The Igbo child's musical training involves learning and responding to simple rhythms in form of nodding, clapping, tapping simple rhythmic instruments such as empty tins, cans, bottles, and then graduating into more intricate musical sounds and rhythms. At later stage, sounds are translated into more meaningful signs and symbols. Folk songs, folktales and storytelling are part of early childhood musical education, which are fashioned to bring about the child's fundamental developmental need in the society. The child commonly and most effectively reacts to the prevalent social habits of his immediate environment and through adequate exposure to the potentials which traditional music offers, the child grows up to be a useful member of the society.

Traditionally, the musical training of the Igbo child does not require pre-planned or elaborate classroom setup. It goes on with daily life's experiences. Naturally, musical training of every Igbo child takes its root from the mother's womb. Agu (1990:50) posits that,

a pregnant mother, who participates in a limited number of musical activities, is believed to be introducing the baby in the womb to rhythmical movements. When the baby is born, it gradually becomes acquainted with musical sound through lullabies

sung to lull it to sleep and the mother's continuous musical involvement with the baby strapped firmly to her back.

It is through these ways that the Igbo child and infact every African child is nurtured into the tenets of the society. Having said earlier that traditional music is a steering force to the proper understanding of the African culture, it becomes obvious, that adequate attention is given to it to ensure continuity. A child who is well tutored in the cultural activities of his community will grow up to protect and foster it. In continuation Agu (1990:50) reaffirms,

Since all Igbo music including lullabies are affected by the constitution of the societies as well as governed by conventions, children are led to absorb these conventions through music right from the start... through this practice, children become fully enculturated into the music system by the time they grow up.

This solidifies the claim that cultural music plays a part in the development of younger minds.

### **Need for Child's Early Music Education**

The teaching and learning of traditional music early in life prepares a child adequately to face the challenges of adult life. It opens up avenues for the child's overall development in the areas of moral, physical, intellectual, social, historical, psychological alertness and so on. One may then ask how these potentials are made possible through traditional music pedagogy? In answer to such question, each of them should be critically discussed in relation to its relevancy to the child's growth and consequent national development.

### **Moral Development**

It has been noted earlier that traditional music of a nation contains the norms and values which are impacted to the children. Morality is one of the virtues which children learn during folksongs and folktales sessions. Through these media good behaviours are encouraged while bad behaviours are condemned. In some cases direct remarks are made through songs to discourage social vices, at other times allusions are made to send warnings to erring members of the society. Uto-Ezeajugh (2003:182) reiterates.

Through the lyrics of music for instance, children can be confronted with positive or negative images of themselves. When they are confronted with such images, they may be confronted with an image of a positive role model whom they may try to imitate.

To back up her ideas, she quotes Gavus Bolton's statement. Through this experience, five-year olds, fifteen-year olds, twenty-five –year olds...may have their understanding of themselves in relation to the world they live in...It is to be emphasized that a nation which invests in activities that boost high moral standard and discourages moral decadence is laying a very solid foundation for both human and resource-management developments. Similarly, the nation will be free from social ills/pandemic such as bribery and corruption embezzlement, man's inhumanity to man, election mal practice, thuggery and other vices. Morality is the key to progress of a nation and that is why it should be inculcated into the children early in life so that they grow up with it and by the time they become adults they are already equipped to reason in the right direction. It is to be reiterated again that early musical training of the child lays the foundation for a nation's positive growth. Hence morally sound child will grow up a morally sound adult with positive visions.

### **Physical Development**

Traditional music education involves physical activities whereby the entire body is set to reflex and motor action. The importance of physical activities can never be over emphasized both in traditional and modern practices. In his book, *Physical Education Handbook (Revised Edition)* Nwegbu (1978) re-echoed the indispensability of music in Physical Education which comes inform of “singing games, folk dancing and social dances” (pp 11-12) All these help the child to develop physical fitness. A child who develops in strength, agility, flexibility, control, courage, balance and determination through participation in these activities has relatively geared towards self actualization. Because Musical activities have the wit to instill in the practitioner all the afore mentioned qualities in addition to enhancing proper metabolic functioning and good health, it should be jealously guarded and promoted. On the other hand, participation in musical activities provides succour to the mind and relaxes the muscle thereby providing a better condition for physical growth. The child’s aural and visual perceptions are enhanced through musical activities. In this direction, Idamoyibo (2003:83) asserts that,

exposing the baby to musical activities will enable a careful mother to discover early, when she develops hearing or visual impairment. (Because) at certain stages in a child’s development, she is expected to hear and respond to musical and non-musical communications.

A society that comprises of healthy and well formed citizens will spent less in health care management and disease eradication project and thus channels her resources to other areas of development. A healthy nation is a wealthy nation.

### **Intellectual Development**

Music is a creative art form that requires high level of mental ability. During story telling, folktale and simple game songs activities, children’s intellectual abilities are developed. They are faced with the challenges of learning and memorizing most of the stories and songs which usually last throughout life. Similarly, Idamoyibo (2003:86) confirms,

It is indubitable that knowledge gained through music stays in memory for so long; often, till life terminates. Not only does it stay through a man’s longevity, nor function as an aid to memory-recall, but that it provides every needed information contained in its organization in sequential order, when recalled.

However, dancing and playing of musical instruments need serious commitment and intellectual coordination. African rhythm is so complex that at times it seems conflicting but early participation and the ability to summout this problem suggests high intellectual development. During children’s play time, they engage in simple dance activities and accompany themselves with simple musical instruments. Their ability to translate these experiences into meaningful activities is a mark of intellectual growth. This intellectual development acquired through musical activities is utilized in carrying out other functions later in life. Cass-Beggs in Idamoyibo (2003:84) is of the opinion that,

the more the musical activities, the more the child’s training, because it has been proved that children who live in environments that provide only little musical variety have reading problems at school.

Therefore, Intellectual development is very essential in the sense that a fool has no place of honour in any society.

### **Social Development**

Socialization is one of the principal issues in music making. Children at their early stages employ this medium to get acquainted with each other. During play times which of-course must involve musical activities children are trained to associate, accommodate and relate with one another in a most friendly way. Individual differences are tolerated, and harmonious co-existence is ensured. Music as a social activity, provides supporting material for public interaction. Early childhood participation in musical activities enhances greater chances of adaptability and situational adjustment in later years. This is because, during musical activities, people of different characters merge together, practice together perform together under common cultural ethos. A child who is under developed socially, does not integrate well in the society, at times he becomes a social misfit unable to contain or face situational realities and challenges. Such child eventually ends up being timid, shy and always nervous at the sight of a large crowd. A person without solid social foundation lacks sound and complete life development. That is why Oguguo (2003:129) infers that, “music has life. It has a potency. It has a force (and) it has energy”. These musical values validate the claim that traditional music at the early stage of a child makes way for over all development of the child. According to him, “the power and strength of music lie in its potentiality and capacity to address the entire personality structure of man” (p.130) Bearing these in mind, it becomes no exaggeration to argue that socialization through musical experiences forms the bedrock of man’s total development.

### **Historical Development:**

There is no nation, race or region without history, neither is there any society without musical tradition. Music offer a fertile ground where topical issues about a society’s past and present are made bare to the younger ones. Evidently, story telling, folktales and folk songs server as transmitting channels in this direction. In traditional African society and Igbo in particular, story telling is normally accompanied or punctuated with musical responses to create varieties. In discussing the uses of story telling in African societies, Okafor and Ng’andu (2003:179) include that it can be used to

- pass on information, which may be current, topical, historical or legendary. They also transmit the received doctrines of the community, chronicles of the heroes, wars fought and won, migrations of people and the magnanimity of ancestors-the sources of national ego and personality.
- teach morals and mould character
- express their world view and the explanation of phenomena through stories-what belief systems they live by, their values and what they regard as fundamental to the continuity of their personality...

There is no way one can talk of early childhood activities without referring to these all important tripartite phenomena-storytelling, folktale and folksong. It is based on the information and knowledge gathered from these sources that a child becomes a well informed and seasoned member of his community. It is said that “life comes through hearing” or better put “life is in the ear”. In the past, children who stay close to elderly people are more knowledgeable about the history, myths and legends of their community. Even in the present time, there are things or information which must be traced back to tradition which may not be

found in books. All these underscores the importance of traditional musical practices and folklores among children, so that when they grow up, they will be in position to link the past with the present, know their historical background/genealogy, laws and taboos of their land. Obviously, a child who is well grounded in the history and culture of his community will grow up a fulfilled human being who has control over his environment.

### **Psychological Stability**

Music is a form of escapism for stress, anger and boredom, as well as a suiting pill for mental instability. Therefore early introduction to this psycho-therapeutic medium is a move in a right direction. Through musical activities, the child's mental and emotional stabilities are maintained. Mereni (2006:1) says that, "music therapy is recognized as one of the most appropriate and efficacious tool for helping both children, adolescent and adults develop their capacities for emotional and social interaction". The discovery of this immense therapeutic power inherent in music has translated into several usages. In most religious and healing centers, music (singing and dancing) takes the place of modern orthodox medicine in restoring good health. Aluede and Omoera (2009:13) are also convinced of the "power of music and dance in the treatment, education, training and rehabilitation of children and adults suffering from physical, mental or emotional disorder".

The question then becomes how music functions in bringing about healing in concerned patients? In this instance, we shall look at certain conditions which seem abnormal to the normal body processes and functioning.

### **Psyche Disorder**

Through literature and personal experiences, it is now a fact that most people who are mentally deranged have special appeal for music. The reason though not based on scientific proof is that there is a strong sync between music and psyche (soul or mind) which the brain translates into emotions. Emotions can be calm, outrageous or violent, it all depends on the nature of stimulus, coupled with the initial state of the psyche. The ultimate aim of music in this direction is to bring orderliness. And that justifies the reason why many religious and healing centers use music as a therapy for psyche disorder. This submission is reinforced by Aluede and Omoera's (2009:14) observations among Iyayi religious society where "music is used as medicine and as accompaniment to healing rites".

It is not uncommon in this present time to see people with mental disorder being paraded along streets by a seemingly normal person who controls them with musical instruments such as whistle or metal gong. In psychiatric hospitals gadgets that play music are provided in the patients wards to keep them calm. It was also said in the Holy Bible, in Samuel, chapter 16:14-23, that David used to play lyre to drive away evil spirit from Saul whenever he was tormented. (p. 219) The music help to make him feel refreshed once again. It is be assumed that music has a very strong impact on the spiritual domain of man.

### **Physical Disorder**

There are ailments which are better managed through exercises than through medication. These include High Blood pressure, Obesity, Diabetes and so on. During exercises, excess sugar and fat pigments are broken down and got rid of through sweat, thereby leaving the body free and healthy. Exercises increase blood flow and circulation in the body and facilitate digestion. All these promote good health. It is to be noted that the best exercise that is devoid of undue fatigue is musical activity. A child who is trained to love musical activities early in life will grow up a happy and healthy person.

### Avenues for Teaching and Learning Traditional music

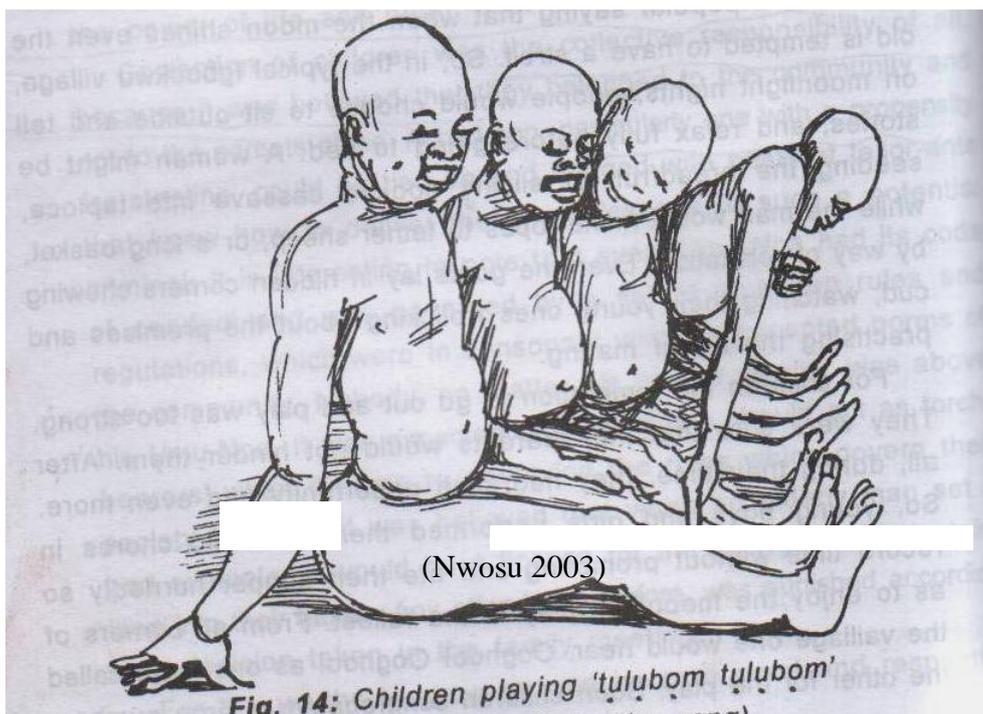
It has been said earlier, that teaching and learning of traditional music is not confined to elaborate classroom tutorial, rather it is controlled by physical, cultural and social factors. This implies that the opportunity for a child to learn depends on the facilities available for such learning. In African societies and the Igbo in particular, traditional music teaching and learning can take place through the following media.

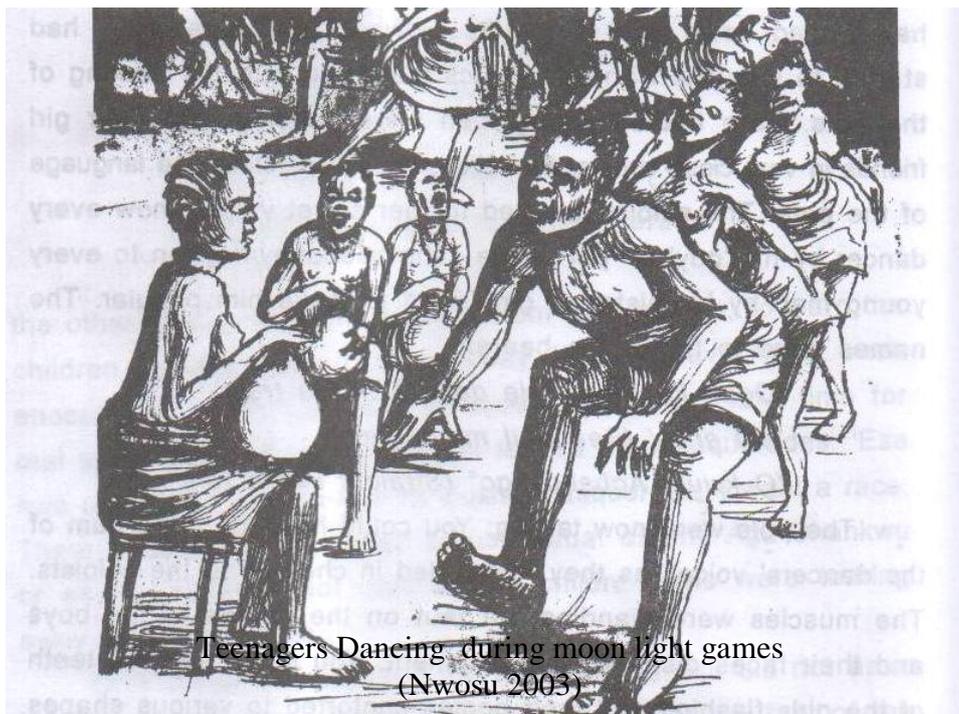
### Moonlight and Leisure Time

This period means a lot in the lives of both children and adults. It is the time when children gather and listen to folktales; folksongs and other stories from adults. At times they stay on their own in the open village square where they play, dance and learn from one another. Little children normally form their group where they rehearse and sing songs they learnt from adults, while the grown-ups or teenagers have their own group. Their primary aim is to play, sing or dance around. Nwosu (2003:39-49) posits that,

The girls would start the *ukwe mgba* (a type of teenage dance) music. They would be in a circle, clapping, singing and dancing. They sang meaningful songs to advise themselves or to correct immoral behaviour of some of the youths in their midst.

The dance does not exclude boys, they all participate in the game. This is a period that is not joked with in Igbo tradition in the past because it offers a greater opportunity for teaching and learning of cultural activities and community values.





### **Initiation**

This is a period when one identifies oneself with a particular class of people. Children at certain stages in their lives involve themselves in such practice. As part of the activities, the intending initiates are taught various musical responses and dance steps which they perform on their initiation day. Some of such initiations include, girls' puberty rites, cult and masquerade initiation. Beyond Igbo culture, there are- *Dipo* ceremony in krobo ethnic group of Ghana, *Reed* dance of Swazi girls, (website) *domba* initiation school of Venda-South Africa (Blacking 1976). Ladies circumcision ceremony-Opha in Okpe land in Delta State of Nigeria (Idamoyibo 2005). All these activities constitute very fertile grounds for music teaching and learning in Igbo tradition.

### **Festivals and Ceremonies**

Festivals and ceremonies in Igbo tradition can never be complete without musical activities. As a matter of fact, both children and adult avail themselves of this opportunity each time a festival is to be celebrated. It may be a religious or cultural festival such as celebration of a deity, New yam festival, mass return celebration and so on. In view of the celebration, various communities are engaged in rehearsing and up dating their music repertoire. At times new ones are learnt. These activities expose children to the traditional music of their people.

### **Method of Teaching and Learning Traditional Music**

Although it has been stated that there is no formal classroom instruction in traditional music pedagogy yet there are steps or methods involved for learning to take place. These include:

### **Listening**

Listening is one of the major steps in learning traditional music. The understanding of the traditional music requires attentive listening so as to capture the message the music is transmitting in terms of the melody, text, rhythm and so on. It is only when you listen to the

music that you will be able to tell the nature of the music and also be able to commit it to memory.

### **Observation**

Through observation one can learn how a particular instrument is being played as well as dance steps displayed by the dancers. Through this method, the learner can observe how gestures are employed to create meaningful situations and or achieve communication.

### **Imitation**

A learner may decide to imitate a particular style of performance or even a performer. In this case he may try to mimic or model after a star performer. It may be the way a performer sings, dances or plays an instrument that is most striking to such learner.

### **Participation**

This is otherwise known as learning by doing. In this case the learner is integrated into the performance. The learner comes in direct contact with the performer. As he participates, he studies the patterns and gets corrections where he performs wrongly. In this type of method, the learner may or may not be strictly restricted to any particular instructor. He has the choice of selecting whom to under study.

### **Apprenticeship**

This method is peculiar to learners who want to specialize in a particular skill, may be as professional singer, drummer or any other type of skill. Here the learner is confined to a particular teacher whose duty is to guide, direct, instruct and supervise the learner. A lot of things are involved in this type of teaching and learning method which includes making of an agreement. The agreement is expected to contain

- ✓ the time span for the training
- ✓ the amount to be paid, either cash or material
- ✓ the mode of such payment, whether full or installmental
- ✓ code of conduct during learning periods
- ✓ periods of teaching-whether part time or full time
- ✓ conditions for final settlement etc.

In most of the traditional musical practices that require professionalism, apprenticeship is very necessary. All these practices are aimed at perpetuating traditional musical practices in Igbo society and Africa in general. The growth of this traditional music with all its undeniable benefits to the society contribute to national development.

### **Factors militating against Traditional Music Education Technology**

The introduction of technology and its effects in the society has brought a sharp diversion from traditional way of life to something else. Children no longer engage in cultural practices. The question of moon light games, and learning of norms and values have drastically declined at the expense of other modern ways of recreation. The existence of computer, television, film house and so on has made traditional practices appear too remote to be preferred.

### **Western Influence**

Westerners brought Christianity and Education which conflicted with the traditional practices. The orientation they carried along with them made many converts and adherents feel so absurd to go back to tradition. They were even doctored to the extent of regarding

most of the practices as satanic. This negative conception endangers the longevity of our traditional music.

### **Urbanization**

The quest for modern life style has made many people vacate their villages and settle in towns and cities where they feel are more comfortable, better disposed for jobs and business. In the town, they divert to other types or means of relaxation other than traditional ways.

### **Education policy**

The national policy on education is a defective one, in the sense that it does not accord equal prominence to all programmes of study. Some courses are ostensibly christened core subjects while others are regarded as electives. Even where the relative merits of those courses are guaranteed, the already generated complex or bias in the minds of people has become a serious impediment towards the study of such courses. Ironically, it was stated in the national policy on Education (1981:10) under pre-primary education, section 2, no 10, item e, that the policy gears towards “inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities”. This proposal is quite commendable but the unfortunate thing is the problem of implementation. There is no conducive environment for such training to take place. No teachers and no facilities to stimulate the learner’s creative abilities. The lesson period is more or less a mock type, as it is normally fixed towards dismissal when the learners are almost exhausted. All these and more make the whole system unproductive especially as it concerns our traditional music.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The discussion made so far has evidently shown that traditional music education is a worthwhile venture which should not be allowed to waste away. The writer is therefore suggesting that:

- ✓ children should be exposed to the traditional music of their community early in life by their parents and elders.
- ✓ technology notwithstanding, the community should make it a point of duty to organize festivals and activities where children’s musical participations are encouraged with gifts and laurels .
- ✓ parents who live in the urban centers should try as much as possible to take their children back to villages once in a while for them to experience what lives in the villages are like and also participate in some of the village activities.
- ✓ Government on their part should provide enabling environment for such teaching and learning to take place. They should employ teachers who would help to see that traditional music does not phase out.
- ✓ Ethnomusicology teachers should also see that they improve and ensure continuity of traditional music through studies, researches and documentation.

## CONCLUSION

The Traditional music of a nation as a matter of fact is the main custodian of its traditional values. The importance of this traditional music does not end with traditional values, it extends its usefulness to the overall development of a child. It also plays important role in eradicating or controlling some abnormal behaviour in individuals. Obviously a nation's development is judged by the extent which it manages both human and material resources creditably.

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