Resolving Nigeria's Socio-Political Crises through Traditional Music Education

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Abstract		Conference Article

Social unrest in Nigeria is aching and disturbing, such that the future of the nation and the youths raises unanswerable questions. Efforts to curb the menace most times yielded little positive results. To build a dynamic nation is to mold the coming generations and to prepare these leaders of tomorrow for the challenges of abolishing the endangering practices in our society. The introduction of music education into our first-generation schools has positively influenced the moral behavior of schoolboys and girls, who now hold a significant percentage of leadership positions in this noble country. Over time, changes of both positive and negative effects have brought Nigerian development into a precarious situation, and citizens experience predominantly adverse incidents in the country.

Keywords: Social unrest, Music education, Youth development, Moral values, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria has been experiencing heartbreaking socio-political storms in recent years from various political zones within the country. The political institution has degenerated into a problem of reducing social goodness and evil to entirely personal issues, independent of social, cultural, and religious systems that shape the actions and imaginations of the citizenry. Nigeria, a country which is noted to be more credible and persuasive of its own people who are freely united in voluntary harmony around common goals, but with accumulation problems of corruption, patronage, disunity, sectionalism, factionalism, and all that be. **Socio-political crisis** refers to episodes of instability, conflict, or tension that arise from political, ethnic, or economic fault lines within a society. In the Nigerian context, this includes communal violence, youth unrest, and insurgencies that undermine social cohesion and governance. These crises disrupt normal social processes and challenge traditional mechanisms of order and reconciliation. Addressing them, therefore, requires both *formal structures* (e.g., legal and political institutions) and *culturally resonant practices* that can help restore trust and a shared identity. All these have created a sense of insecurity among Nigerians who understand the implications of the nation's socio-political instability, and as a result,

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a significant percentage of people who can afford it daily take to going to other countries. There are characteristic features revealed in the political institutions that are truly devastating and do not indicate hope for improvement to the citizenry. Troubles of a small degree often escalate into greater ones that law enforcement agencies are unable to control. Police in those days were feared at the sight of the uniform by criminals, but today it looks like they (police) are not in any form recognised and are relegated to nonentities in society. The act of criminology is prevalent in our tertiary institutions; cultism and examination malpractice have become the norm at almost all levels of education. Oyedoku (2010) expresses his concern and highlights some of the concerning incidents in the nation.

> There are barbaric acts, ranging from the murder of innocent citizens by hired killers, armed robbery (now on the increase), ineffectiveness of the law enforcement agents, irregular water and electricity supply, appalling state of postal communication, inaccurate census, and the standard of education in our system.

She further laments the precarious situation of Nigeria's economy, which could have generated unimaginable income for the citizenry.

> Economically, Nigeria is blessed with diverse resources that ought to be harnessed to boost the economy. Petroleum is at the top of the list of economic resources. Whereas this country is often referred to as "a land with milk and honey", agriculture has been partially ignored. The most disheartening aspect of it is that our government often pays lip service to helping the peasant farmers. Naturally endowed resources, such as coal, iron, steel, gold, cement, bauxite, and many others, have been largely abandoned in favor of oil, and we have become dependent on overseas countries for virtually all our needs.

Corruption is at an alarming rate in Nigeria and is posing an unimaginable threat to the economy. All those who found themselves in the corridors of power in Nigeria believe they have the right as long as they are there to enrich their pockets at any means at the expense of other Nigerians. The politicians who are supposed to represent the electorate turn their backs on their people and concentrate on their own well-being. In light of this, a series of financial crimes was discovered and attributed to these politicians and individuals in positions of power. In the attempt to curb this because of the implications on the nation, George (2011) states that:

> The Nigeria, which ought to be a developed country by now, going by the quality of its economic and human resources, endowed with favourable climatic conditions, as well as good natural, agricultural and mineral resources that could propel its development in all ramifications still struggling to break free from the shackles of underdevelopment engendered by the actions, mistakes, malfeasance and unpatriotic disposition of its citizens.

Different leaders have made efforts on behalf of this nation at various times since its inception. For example, Major Nzeogwu staged his coup d'état because public service was riddled with corruption, and politicians/public service officials were receiving kickbacks for all awarded contracts. He announced in the 1966 coup that his intention and those of his colleagues were to rid the country of irresponsible politicians, incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats, restore respectability and accountability to the Nigerian public service" (Njoku, 2010).

Part of the government efforts led to the establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000 and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003, charged with the investigation of financial crimes such as advance fee fraud (popularly known as 419) and money laundering. People of repute were appointed to head these bodies with the hope that society would improve if the 'bad' individuals were removed and replaced with 'good' ones (George, 2011). In his own argument, Angaye (2003) emphasizes "the failure of Nigerian leaders to establish good government, forge national integration and promote economic progress has led to mass poverty and unemployment, and the resultant communal, ethnic, religious and class conflicts. Rather than the chains of poverty, the poor have little or nothing in the form of poverty to lose and are easily engaged by war-mongers as mercenary fighters. Poverty increases the number of people "prepared to kill or to be killed for a given cause".

Review of Empirical Studies on Socio-Political Crisis in Nigeria

Several empirical studies have focused on the relationship between **governance failure and political violence**. Using national survey data and conflict event datasets, researchers have demonstrated a strong correlation between weak state institutions, corruption, and the escalation of violence across different regions of Nigeria (World Bank, 2023). These studies reveal that citizens' declining trust in political leadership and public institutions significantly increases the likelihood of political protests, electoral violence, and communal clashes.

Another dominant strand of empirical research examines **youth unemployment and socio-economic exclusion** as drivers of socio-political instability. Quantitative studies drawing on labour force data and household surveys show that unemployed and underemployed youths are disproportionately involved in political violence, criminal networks, and insurgent movements (UNDP, 2023). A major empirical report by the United Nations Development Programme found that lack of economic opportunities and perceived injustice were among the strongest predictors of youth participation in extremist and violent groups in Nigeria (UNDP, 2023).

Ethno-religious conflict has also received sustained empirical attention. Field-based and ethnographic studies conducted in the Middle Belt and North-East regions reveal that competition over land, political representation, and access to resources often framed through ethnic or religious identities continues to fuel recurring communal violence (International Crisis Group, 2022). These studies highlight how political elites instrumentalize identity narratives, exacerbating mistrust and prolonging cycles of conflict.

Recent empirical research has further explored the **social implications of prolonged insecurity**. Using displacement data and community-level surveys, researchers document how violence disrupts education, erodes social capital, and weakens traditional institutions that previously mediated conflicts at the local level (ACLED, 2023; UNDP, 2022). These findings suggest that the breakdown of indigenous conflict-management mechanisms has intensified community vulnerability and reduced resilience.

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2008) examines the potential impact of social change on society. Social change, in the broadest sense, refers to any alteration in social relations. Viewed this way, social change is an ever-present phenomenon in any society. A distinction is sometimes made between processes of change within the social structure, which serve in part to maintain the structure, and processes that modify the structure (societal change). The specific meaning of social change depends first on the social entity considered. Changes in a small group may be significant within that group itself but negligible on the broader societal level. Similarly, the observation of social change depends on the time span studied; most short-term changes are negligible when examined over a longer period of time. Small-scale and short-term changes are characteristic of human societies as customs and norms evolve, new techniques and technologies are developed, environmental changes prompt new adaptations, and

conflicts lead to redistributions of power. An individual is the product of his family, clan, culture, and, of course, the nation; therefore, whatever socio-political vice Nigeria encountered today is a result of individual interest.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory provides a useful explanatory framework for understanding how behaviours, values, attitudes, and social norms are acquired and transmitted within a society. Albert Bandura, a Canadian-American psychologist, proposed the theory, emphasizing that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and social interaction in addition to direct experience (Bandura, 1977). Bandura challenged earlier behaviourist models that limited learning to stimulus–response mechanisms, arguing instead that individuals learn by observing models within their social environment and internalizing the consequences of those behaviours. Bandura (1986) asserts that attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation all have an impact on learning, which is a social and cognitive process. Respected, culturally relevant, or thought-to-be-successful role models have a greater influence on people's behavior. Observational learning, the process by which people learn what is appropriate and what is not, is a central idea in Social Learning Theory. Bandura also introduced the idea of reciprocal determinism, which explains behaviour as the product of continuous interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour itself (Bandura, 1986). This implies that social environments such as families, communities, and cultural institutions play a decisive role in shaping individual and collective conduct.

In relation to socio-political behaviour, Bandura (2001) further demonstrated how learned attitudes can influence moral judgement, aggression, cooperation, and civic responsibility. Through mechanisms such as moral disengagement, individuals may learn to justify violence or intolerance, especially in contexts of prolonged conflict. Positive social models, on the other hand, can encourage good behavior, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence.

Relevance and Analysis of the Theory to the Present Study

Social Learning Theory is particularly relevant to this study because traditional music education operates as a social learning system. Traditional music is learned through participation, imitation, and observation in communal settings in Nigerian societies. Younger members of the community learn songs, rhythms, dance, and performance etiquette by watching elders and experienced performers, thereby internalizing not only musical skills but also social values such as respect, unity, discipline, and collective responsibility.

Through lyrics, performance contexts, and communal participation, traditional music functions as a behavioural model that reinforces socially acceptable conduct and discourages deviant or violent behaviour. When traditional music communicates messages of peace, social justice, accountability, and communal harmony, these values are learned and reproduced by members of the society through repeated exposure and participation. Therefore, Social Learning Theory explains how, without formal instruction or coercion, traditional music education can influence political awareness, moral reasoning, and conflict-related behavior. Within the Nigerian socio-political context, where youth are highly susceptible to learning behaviours from peers, media, and political actors, traditional music education offers an alternative cultural environment in which positive social modelling can occur. The theory supports the argument that reviving traditional music education can help counteract learned violent behaviours by providing culturally relevant models of peaceful coexistence and civic responsibility.

Empirical Studies Based on Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory has been widely applied across disciplines, including education, criminology, media studies, and peace research. Bandura's work in criminology was extended by Akers (1998), who demonstrated how social interaction and reinforcement teach violent and deviant behavior.

Social Learning Theory has been used in educational research to explain how informal and participatory learning environments transmit values, attitudes, and social skills (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Bandura's framework is also used in peace and conflict research to explain how community practices, cultural narratives, and role models influence how people respond to conflict and reconciliation (Bandura, 2001). Although limited empirical work explicitly applies Social Learning Theory to traditional music education in Nigeria, the theory has been implicitly used in studies examining indigenous cultural practices as mechanisms for socialization, moral education, and community cohesion. This theoretical gap further justifies the present study's application of Social Learning Theory to traditional music education as a culturally grounded strategy for addressing socio-political crises.

Music Education

Music education is the art of imparting knowledge of music to the child. The music teacher is expected to be knowledgeable in the psychology of children and be able to apply suitable methodologies in imparting music knowledge to children. This is essential because children's responses to music are holistic in nature. Because it satisfies a human desire for learning, it is the only educational discipline that provides a medium of clarity to meet the needs of learners, allowing them to absorb information more informally than abstractly. Music has the potential of being one of the most valuable subjects for enhancing the human personality through complete involvement in inquiry techniques and a creative approach to learning. It is known, however, that the conceptual approach to learning should be integrated with learning by participating. Onyiuke (2009). Uzoma (2001) in Onyiuke (2009) notes that "music education has, as one of its cardinal objectives, the provision of experiences and training for learners. Such experiences, when acquired, would help learners to live and contribute positively towards the progress and development of their society".

This paper will not be complete without a brief history of music education and its impacts in Nigeria. According to Ekwueme (2008), art music was indeed introduced to Nigeria by European missionaries, including the Methodists at Badagry in 1842, the Church Missionary Society at Abeokuta in 1845, the Presbyterians at Calabar in 1846, the Baptists at Ijaiye in 1853, and the Catholics at Lagos in 1867. The settlement of these missionaries and other immigrants (from the West Indies, Brazil, Sierra Leone, and Europe) in Nigeria aided the acquisition of European art music through Western education and lifestyle. The missionaries raised churches and school choirs to sing at church services and religious activities. The choirs were trained and taught a good number of repertoires of church liturgies germane to their respective churches. The schools provided the initial training for Africans who later travelled to the UK and other countries to further their education in music. Such people included Rev. Robert Coker, Rev. A.T. Olude, T.K.E. Philips, Fela Sowande, Rev. J.J. Ransome-Kuti, Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, W.W.C. Echezona, Dayo Dedwkw, Ayo Bankole, Akin Euba, and a host of others. For a long time after the establishment of mission schools and later, the education sector, music education was not included in the education curriculum, even though there were not a few educated music tutors in many of the schools who organized music and choirs for social activities.

The Nigerian government has not recognized the importance of music education as a tool for nation-building until now. It has relegated it to the background behind specific subjects and the mercy of other subjects. Suffice it to note that the individuals who studied music education either privately or in the formal educational system are now people of note who cannot afford to have their name trampled in the mud like others who run after what the Bible describes as vanity and vexation of the spirit.

Traditional Music Education

This is the process through which traditional music knowledge, skills, and associated cultural values are transmitted. Unlike Western formal music instruction, traditional music education is deeply embedded in everyday life and occurs through *participatory learning*, imitation, mentorship, and active engagement in communal music-making

(Effiong, 2025; Onyeji, 2025). It integrates performance with social meaning, fostering not only musical competence but also moral formation, collective identity, and social cohesion. Traditional pedagogies emphasize experiential learning within community structures, rather than relying on written notation or formal curricula.

Closely related is the notion of **indigenous music**, which highlights *locally grounded musical expressions* that reflect the epistemologies, performance practices, and aesthetic logics of specific cultural groups (Onwekwe, 2025; Adedeji, 2025). Indigenous music is distinguished by its functional embedding in communal life whether in festivals, conflict mediation rituals, or rites of passage and serves as a repository of collective memory and shared values.

Traditional music has historically played a central role in African socio-political organization, serving as a medium for communication, social regulation, political commentary, and the formation of communal identity. In many African societies, music is inextricably linked to governance structures, rituals, and conflict mediation processes, serving as a channel through which social norms, political authority, and collective values are expressed and reinforced (Nketia, 1974).

In the Nigerian context, traditional music has been used to comment on leadership, mobilize communities, criticize social injustice, and promote moral accountability. Musical performances often accompany political events, festivals, and communal gatherings, where lyrics and symbolic expressions convey messages related to unity, social order, and collective responsibility (Omojola, 2012). Scholars note that traditional musicians functioned as cultural custodians and social critics, using music to influence public opinion and regulate behavior within the community (Adegbite, 2015).

Empirical studies further suggest that traditional music plays a crucial role in fostering social cohesion by reinforcing shared identity and collective memory, particularly during periods of political tension or social transition. Through participatory performance and communal listening, traditional music fosters dialogue and reinforces values that support peaceful coexistence (Ogunrinade, 2020). These socio-political functions position traditional music as a viable cultural resource for addressing contemporary crises in Nigeria.

Indigenous Pedagogies and Traditional Music Education

Indigenous pedagogies refer to culturally embedded methods of knowledge transmission that emphasize experiential learning, oral tradition, mentorship, and communal participation. Traditional music education in African societies is grounded in these pedagogical approaches, where learning occurs informally through observation, imitation, and active engagement rather than formal classroom instruction (Nketia, 1999).

In Nigeria, traditional music education is integrated into everyday social life, with children and youths learning musical skills and cultural values simultaneously through participation in festivals, rituals, and communal performances. This pedagogical process facilitates the transmission of moral values, social norms, and collective identity alongside musical competence (Onyeji, 2018). Scholars argue that such indigenous learning systems foster social responsibility, cooperation, and respect for authority, which are crucial for maintaining social stability.

Despite their effectiveness, indigenous pedagogies have been increasingly marginalized by Western educational models, leading to a decline in traditional music education and its associated social functions. Recent scholarship, therefore, advocates for the revitalization and integration of indigenous music pedagogies into contemporary educational frameworks as a means of promoting cultural sustainability, social cohesion, and peacebuilding (Adegbite, 2015; Ogunrinade, 2020).

The Relevance of Music Education to Character Development

One primary function of music is to build character. This was revealed in the philosophy of the early Greek era. As asserted by Ekwueme (2009), starting form Greek culture, Plato in about 300 B.C. along with his contemporaries and those that came after

him, Aristotle, among others, was the need for the study of music in the development of the mind and soul … they believed that future leaders, i.e. students were expected to have basic functional knowledge of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and harmonies (music). Daramola and Ayeyemi (2009) corroborate that the essence of music education cannot be underestimated. Plato considered music and gymnastics to be the two earliest essentials in education, and the chief function of education in the early Greek era was to build individuals of character, grace, and stamina. "Inherent in these goals was the concept of developing the mind, body, and soul". Like the music of other world cultures, Nigerian music is closely tied to socio-cultural contexts that reflect the diverse characteristics of the culture and traditions of the people, as well as the ideals and virtues they promote.

Music is a discipline that wraps up the daily life of man; it is multifunctional in all activities in society, and it is a phenomenon that occupies a vital place in the mind and life of individuals. According to Faseun (2001), prior to the introduction of Western music education, there were traditional, approved, and effective means of passing musical knowledge from one generation to the next. This kind of traditional training made Nigerian traditional musicians the custodians of authentic information (through myths, proverbs, epics, folklore, poetry, folktales, history, and so on) about their community, acquired through oral transmission. These musicians were disciplined and respected personalities in society. They belonged, although they may not have been rich materially or financially, the music education they acquired was enough to prove their integrity. This model is not valued in Nigeria today due to the prevailing belief that musicians are perceived as beggars and undeserving individuals. There is also the influence of Western culture, which has altered the moral landscape of Africans, particularly in our music. Ekwueme (2008) says youth culture worldwide appears to be influenced by American youths. The rapid rate of technological development in mass communication, television, and recorded music facilitates the swift dissemination of rock music to every corner of the world. Foreign youths' music has indeed influenced the originality of creativity among Nigerian youths in music-making. The extent of influence of this acculturation is revealed from childhood (age 8 to 30). For example, the male rock musician wears wigs, earrings, plaits hair, lipstick, tattoos, tattered jeans, and is almost half-naked on stage, and so on. All these do not portray a reasonable manner, but rather a way of making themselves relevant in society and generating money, as it has become a way of life. The socio-political abuse has greatly ravaged this nation to a point that if care is not taken, it could collapse every other institution upon which it is learning for sustainability.

Music education in Nigeria can be made one of the core subjects in the school curriculum, from pre-school level to university level, with the objectives of impacting societal culture, norms, morals, and so on in the lives of Nigerian youths, which means that it builds personalities through music. Furthermore, Nigerian folksongs are rich in teaching moral ethics and can be used to guide the youth toward better values.

Possible Suggestions to Solve the Problem

a) The government should realize the impact of music in the life of the individual as a corrective measure, and that if such an individual is nurtured in polite manners, his or her contribution to nation-building will always be positive. Therefore, music education should be included in the school curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria.

b) African culture teaches norms, values, and beliefs. Music is a culture promoter; the government should promote this culture through music (folksongs) at all social gatherings, and any attitude or appearance that negates the culture should be discouraged. Folksongs evoke a sense of patriotism (Allen, 1962).

c) Although there cannot be a mixed culture, this should be controlled.

d) Parents should realize the importance of music education and, therefore, should subscribe to it to sustain their good names in society.

e) The three major religions in Nigeria (Christianity, Islam, and Traditional religions) are a medium of moral teaching. The ethics of these religions, combined with music education, serve as a powerful driving force for developing character.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a country blessed with people of potential, good administrators, and wise politicians, capable of raising the nation from rags to riches, if its political institutions are adequately managed. The writer analysed a few incidents of conflict in Nigeria as a result of socio-economic change and other causes. Because individuals and different groups within the nation want to maintain their social and political class and status, conflicts of varying degrees arise in the process of achieving their desires.

Music as a cultural phenomenon centres on enlightening and teaching individuals, training the mind and soul to become mature, self-sufficient, and of good character in society. Through the ethics of religion, especially those of the Christian faith, which has been practiced since the days of the missionaries in Nigeria. Music education is, therefore, recommended as a school subject to train students' minds for a better nation.

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