

## **Rethinking the Administrative Legacies of the Nsukka Music School**

**Ogisi, Arugha Aboyowa, Ph.D**  
C/o Department of Music  
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

Administration is the function of leadership at the highest level of an organisation. The duties of the chief executive is to establish and formulate policies that facilitate the administration towards achieving the objectives of the organisation. The success and failure of an organisation depends largely on it. The widely acknowledge successes of the Department of music, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) hereafter Nsukka Music School (NMS) is largely due to the administrative policies that were established by the founding head of Department, Dr. Marylyn Edna Smith (later Edet). This paper interrogates the administrative policies of the NMS and their effects, and consequences as catalyst of growth and development or otherwise through the years. Data for the study were obtained from participant observation of the authors as a student in NMS from 1977 to 1982, interview of alumni and study of published articles and official files in the NMS. The technique of historical reconstruction was used in sieving the facts from the documents and assembled. The administrative policies were providing and maintaining musical instruments for staff and students, admitting students based on available resources, provision of a music building and instituting performance as community service. It is recommended that all DsM in Nigeria should establish administrative policies that enhance achieving its objectives. Administrative policies facilitated the achievements of the NMS.

**Keywords:** Department of music, history of music education, legacies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Music School, policies, practices

### **Introduction**

The Nsukka Music School (NMS), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) became well known among scholars in the humanities not because it was the first Department of Music (DM) in Nigeria, but by being the model for subsequent Departments of Music (DsM) because of its policies and practices of which some were administrative. Fortunately NMS was established under the leadership of an astute administrator, Dr Edna Marylyn Smith, with the assistance of a dedicated team of lecturers. This structure prevented the NMS from failing in the achievement of its academic and administrative goals, and thus, it became a leading light in higher music education in Nigeria. This paper discusses the administrative policies that were established and experimented upon until they became practices in the NMS. Six decades after, most of the administrative policies are still in use.

All applicants, by whichever mode they seek admission, must satisfy the Department of Music of their basic musical aptitude and competence at a specially conducted departmental audition. This consists of written (theoretical) and practical examinations. Candidates are recommended for admission only after they have successfully passed the audition, which normally holds in the last Thursday and Friday in August in each year.

Most articles on the NMS focus on the fact that it is the first Department of music in Nigeria, but fail to mention that all its achievements were facilitated by administrative structures that drove the process. The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to discuss how the administrative practices were a major stimulus for sustainable growth and development in the NMS. This paper would enable the reader to realise the importance of administrative mechanism in a system, especially within higher music educational setting. The paper draws from what was done in the golden years of the NMS, 1961 to 1985. The data for the paper were derived from the historical accounts on the administration of the NMS especially during the early years when most of its policies and practices were established, and from pioneer students who spread the administrative policies (AP).

### **The Administrative Legacies**

Within the context of this paper, administrative legacy is a practice that emerged as a result of managing a system over time. There are administrative legacies that were established in the NMS, which are discussed hereafter.

### **Audition, an Admission Requirement**

From its beginning in 1961, applicants to the NMS underwent a two part examination that consisted of a written test on the theory of music and thereafter they were auditioned in sight reading, sight singing, aural culture, vocal or instrumental performance. According to Meki Nzewi, the examination was to identify candidates that were musically literate but can ‘demonstrate enthusiasm for music,’ by possession of a certificate in music, ability to sing and or play a musical instrument, having a history of participation in musical activities. In the audition candidates were required to demonstrate musicianship by either singing a song or playing an instrument and demonstrate music literacy by singing at sight a short excerpt from piece that is written in staff notation. In a society where such musical skills are rare, the audition caused candidates to seek formal musical knowledge from person with such knowledge. As church choir masters were the early recipients of such knowledge as score reading in Nigeria, became the early educators of formal literary musical knowledge across Nigeria. It is instructive to note that the choir masters as music educators evolved in response to a weak or near absence of school music, which made the church choir the avenue for formal literacy music education in Nigeria and it was the means through which the pioneer formally educated Nigerian musicians and music scholars received their initial music training. From 1961 to 2015, ‘the admission process was by entrance examination and audition’ wherein ‘all applicants by whichever mode they sought admission, must satisfy the Music Department of their basic musical aptitude and competence at a specially conducted departmental audition.’

Audition ascertained candidates’ musical aptitude and suitability or otherwise to ensure that only “candidates that have aptitude for music” were admitted (Olusorji, 2013). The result of the audition was the most important component of admission requirements, such that applicants who failed the audition were not admitted. The use of audition was widespread among Departments of Music

(DsM) that were established in the 20th century. However, since 2015, the basis for admitting music students in virtually all DsM in Nigeria's tertiary institutions have been the candidate's certificate(s), and their scores in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME), and the post-UTME test. This is rather unfortunate for a discipline such as music being that the practice is psychomotor skill dependent and also that it is contrary to the practice in reputable institutions across the world.

### **Provision and Use of Orchestral Instruments by Staff and Students**

From inception of the NMS, students were required to pay a studio fee every session, which committed the UNN to providing students with piano and an orchestral instrument, and to maintain same for the session. It was a strategy of reducing the burden on music students and to encourage them to remain in the NMS.

In 1970, UNN employed a musical instruments technologist, Okechukwu Ndubuisi (1939 -1992), whose duty was to repair and maintain the instruments. In the 1960s, students' registration (SR) was abysmally low and there were more instruments than students. But with the steady growth in SR from 1970, students were encouraged to purchase their personal orchestral instruments. While a few students did, most of them relied on the instruments that the NMS provided. By the late 1970s, the stock of departmental instruments had become unserviceable that they needed replacing. The UNN replaced them in 1980 by purchasing a large assemblage of western musical instruments, accessories, amplifiers, loudspeakers, microphones and stands, and several books. The instruments exceeded the number required for both staff and students' use that the surplus were stored away for use in subsequent years. But like everything else in life, musical instruments deteriorate with use and age irrespective of availability of spare parts and the maintenance protocol deployed by musical instrument technologist.

From the late 1980s, the NMS faced the dilemma of increasing students' enrollment and shortfall in subvention from government. It got to the point where instruments could no longer be replaced, repaired or serviced and deteriorated rapidly. Pianos were badly hit by the experience that it reached the point where there were no serviceable pianos for both teaching and practice. Amidst this development, the NMS urged students to purchase electronic keyboards as substitutes for the piano.

Following the death of the pioneer instrument technologist in 1996, other instrument technologists and curators were employed by the UNN in a gesture that gave the impression that the erstwhile tradition of maintaining musical instruments would continue, but did not. The NMS tradition of providing and maintaining musical instruments has not been well replicated in other DsM largely due to lack of funds and personnel, which left a trail of poorly maintained instruments in most DsM in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, the instruments maintenance policy that was introduced and practiced for most of the history of the NMS has proved to be cost effective.

It appears that the policy of providing students with instruments that was introduced in the early 1960s was to attract students to the department in a society that did not regard the academic study of music highly, nor considered it worth studying at the tertiary level of education. After the Nigeria civil war, the policy continued even when the reasons that necessitated its enactment no

longer existed. The policy would have been reviewed to cause students to own their orchestral instruments while the NMS continued providing and maintaining the massive and costly instruments such as pianos, organs, violoncellos and tubas, thereby freeing some funds to address cogent needs. The change would cause students to be more responsible in taking care of their instruments. The economic downturn of the late 1980s should have caused the NMS to realise that the erstwhile instruments policy was no longer tenable or sustainable, and that it was imperative for it to take proactive steps to stem the tide of inadequate funding. The failure to act appropriately was in part responsible for the financial difficulties that the NMS experienced in the 1990s. Since no policy endures in perpetuity, there was the need to review the extant policies to ensure they are in sync with the dynamics of place and time. Although students still pay studio fees, it appears that it is more for provision of practice space than for maintaining instruments.

### **Admission Quota Determined by Available Resources**

The early years of the NMS was characterized by extremely low SR arising from the policy of linking the number of students that are offered admission to available resources. This administrative policy was established and entrenched in the NMS in the early years by Dr Edna Marylyn Smith and was a major factor that led to the production of musically knowledgeable and professional competent pioneer students. This was a cogent requirement in music as students were entitled to a weekly one hour individual lessons in their principal/major instruments, and a weekly half-an-hour lesson in their subsidiary/minor instrument. This meant that each student was entitled to one and half hours of individual lessons per week, thereby setting the staff-student ratio for music at 1:3 (National University Commission, 2012), which means that more lecturers are required to run a DM. However, with dwindling finance from government sources since 2013, it has increasingly become difficult to provide the needed human and material resources for teaching musical skills especially playing musical instruments. This caused the NMS to devise means of increasing its income and decreasing its expenditure, by admitting more students than it can cope with because, from the 2010s, the main criteria for budgeting became SR. This led DsM into compromising academic standards and quality by admitting more students beyond existing capacity in a bid to increase their budgetary allocations. Furthermore, the trend in the new millennium has been to establish DsM by whims and caprices of the institution's management, who are more interested to showcase the administration at public events than for the DsM to perform its main statutory function. In such cases, the DsM are perceived as extensions of the public relation arms of the institutions, than performing their statutory roles. It is worth mentioning that DsM should only be established after meticulous planning and preparation with the understanding that it is capital intensive.

### **Provision of a Music Building as a Priority**

The NMS began in the two floor soundproof building, the Sowande Music building (SMB) to prevent it from polluting the environment by noise. The SMB had a classroom, few staff offices, general office, Head of Department offices, a library, performance room, and practice rooms which met its space needs during its first decade. As SR increased, the NMS was unable to function within the limited space that the NMS requested for a second building, which was built and put to use in the 1976/77 session. In the mid-1980s, SR increased substantially that it became imperative to expand the second building in order to ameliorate the crisis of space that confronted the NMS. In the early 1990s when the new Faculty of Arts building was completed, the NMS was allocated

a general office, two classrooms and few offices for lecturers. Since then, no additional building has been added to the NMS despite increase in staff and SR.

Through the years, the NMS ensured that its buildings were soundproofed, but this has not been the case with other DsM in the country. However, it is worth mentioning that during my visit to the NMS in July 2019, I observed that the soundproof has been eaten up by termites leaving the walls bare. This means that it suffered lack of maintenance, a bane in our society. The fact needs stating that maintaining a facility is cheaper than building a new one.

### **Public Performance as Community Service**

Although the curricula of the NMS did not expressly state that it should put up public performances, but it goes without saying that the products of a training program should display their skills publicly as a part of their training. However, because music performance is hardly rewarded in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, there is apathy towards it. This is despite the fact that it is through performance that music lecturers sustain and improve on their musicianship and overcome the associated challenges. This was the perspective of the fledgling program of the NMS when, it decided “to create a musical atmosphere in the university, [and it] presented a number of programs: operas, student concerts, variety and faculty concert and concerts” (Edet, 1965: 78).

The climax of performances in an academic session in the NMS is the series of performances during the convocation week. Convocation performance became a responsibility of the NMS from the inaugural joint graduation ceremony for the 1963/64 and 1964/65 graduating sets that was held on June 12, 1965. However, since the early 1990s, the NMS has in addition to convocation performances, been saddled with additional responsibilities of providing relevant music for the annual matriculation ceremony and the annual October 7th Founder’s day events. The NMS has played these roles creditably as it relies on its several ensembles that are ready to perform at short notices. As far back as 1965, after the NMS had operated, “a musical environment at the University” (Edet, 1965: 78) for several years. The tide changed in the 1990s that it increasingly became difficult to continue the practice. But since the 1990s, several DsM in Nigeria have become known as talk shops than for music-making.

The musical environment created by the NMS in UNN prepared the students to undertake the first performance tour to “Enugu, Lagos and Ibadan” (Edet, 1965: 78) in 1964. The second and last performance tour took the NMS to Calabar, Aba, Port-Harcourt and Benin City, performing the excerpts from musical, Bless the Bride (lyrics by A. P. Herbert and Music by Vivian Ellis), produced and directed by O’Ndubuisi and a Choral Concert conducted by A. K. Achinivu from March 9th to 20th, 1981. It is unfortunate that forty years after the second tour, there is yet to be another tour. Apart from its public relation benefit, performance tours are important to formal music education as it enables students to have on-the-road experience and learn to handle the challenges of being on the move, transportation, lodging and accommodation, booking of venues, ticketing, and other problems that are peculiar to the Nigerian society that cannot be simulated in the school environment.

The NMS has impacted its immediate environment and the larger Nigerian society through its public performances. It is worth noting that as Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Governing Council



of UNN, Prof. (Mrs) Bolande Awe on returning from UNN's convocation ceremony in 2005, was so fascinated by NMS's awesome performance that she told Professor Omibiyi (1942 – 2016), an NMS alumnus, that NMS choir "sang like angels." It was so because the NMS regards public performances as part of its social responsibility and a duty they owe the public. That being their thought, they put in their best to discharge such functions.

One wonders why there is a decline in public performances by DsM across Nigeria, since performances are essential aspects of their training and also a means of generating musical interest in a community, building clientele and improving the musical tone of a society. Performance tour is a missing link to develop a truly "Nigerian music education tradition that is grounded in Nigerian aspiration" (Adeogun, 2018).

The NMS has been mindful of the place of the broadcast media in propagating its activities and bringing it to the wider society. In the 1970s and 1980s, students and groups in the NMS recorded programs with radio and television stations. During its 1981 tour, the NMS took time to record programs with Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Aba. In 1990 the NMS recorded several programs with the NTA, Enugu, which was broadcast across Nigeria in 1991 with "now established performing groups whose materials derive from African traditional music theatre, have now been established: Contemporary Choral, Modern Choral, Folk-choric, Music-drama, Dance-mime-drama, Traditional dance, Traditional orchestra and Minstrelsy groups" (Nzewi, 1992: 129). These broadcasts publicized the musical competencies of the NMS and played a pivotal role in building its reputation as one of the leading DM in Nigeria. Unfortunately, as it was in the case of performance tours, there has not been other notable television performance since then. Other DsM have also largely not explored the media performance platform.

### **Conclusion**

The establishment of administrative practices at the inception of NMS set a tradition of how things are done. The administrative practices were roadmaps that produced results and prevented subsequent administrators from experimenting with policy issues. It is important to mention that as such administrative policies stir growth and development in a system, they are not immutable, they should be flexible to respond to changes of time and space, but not to every vagaries of fashion.

Every DM should evolve administrative policies that become its engine of growth, integrity marker, and flow chart in the progress of the enterprise. Unfortunately, most humans are good at following established practices than at creating new ones. However, there are leaders who are systemists and structuralist and function/think better within such a setting. They are very few, but critical to the sustainable development of any endeavour. They are the born leaders. Such an individual was Dr. Edna M. Smith. It was this attribute that enabled her to stir the NMS from nothing less to something that we are proud of today. May her tribe increase.

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