

**AN EMPIRICAL MUSIC CURRICULUM: A PANACEA FOR PUPILS’  
DWINDLING INTEREST IN MUSIC IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF  
ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*There exists a disparity between what pupils are programmed to learn as stipulated in the curriculum and what is obtainable in actual classroom situation as regards music. This paper traced pupils dwindling interest in music to the Primary Schools curriculum in Anambra state and its poor implementation. The current curriculum was found to be insensitive to the learning behavior of children, as it does not create room for a playful learning atmosphere; it is Western oriented, neglecting traditional, folk, and recreational songs that would be more meaningful to pupils. It also gave music an imprisoned status by embedding it into other subjects as Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) which was handled by every other teacher. Classroom experience gained by the writer through active teaching and observation of pupils and data collected via assessment chart from 2005 to 2019 have shown that if pupils’ interest were enkindled through creating such conducive musical atmosphere (playful and less rigid) other aspects of their musical learning like rudiments, sight-reading, choral singing, etc. would flow through. An empirical ideology for a new music curriculum was suggested which would include the contribution of music experts; handling of music instruction by qualified and competent teachers; and the provision of adequate teaching/learning materials by the government as promised.*

**Introduction**

Music does not belong to musicologists alone. One of the most fascinating discoveries about music is that everyone is musical to some degree; can respond to music in various ways; and can learn music depending on the manner it is presented. One of the ways I have been able to draw the attention of so many children to music is by a simple musical exercise of ‘name calling’ or ‘speech surrogacy’ by musical instruments. It was demonstrated to them that some musical instruments (speech surrogates) are capable of calling or imitating names for instance,

**Notes played on the**

**Piano/Recorder/Harmonica/Xylophone**

/d:d:r/  
/m:d:r:/  
/m.d:r.r/  
/d.d:r.r/  
/d:r:r/

**Names called/imitated**

Ekene  
Chinenye  
Ogechukwu  
Okechukwu  
Emeka

The realization that these musical instruments (piano, xylophone, Oja (native flute), Ekwe (wooden gong) talking drum, etc) could call their names mesmerized them and they reasoned thus: “if the musical instruments could imitate our names, then they know us and if they knows us, then we can become friends”.

The feasibility of this musical demonstration was hinged on the fact that most African languages, Igbo for example, are tonal. A tonal language distinguishes similar words by applying rising and falling pitches. For example, in Igbo language, ‘akwa` (cloth); `akwa` (bed or bridge). This fact also raised more confidence and responsiveness from the kids knowing that the musical instruments were able to call their names because similar experiment with some Western names was not as successful.

It is therefore very important that an empirical music curriculum should take cognizance of the psychology of children as regards learning and include certain cultural indices like traditional game songs, folk songs, etc., which are attractive to the children.

### **Review of the Current Music Curriculum**

Several scholars have weighed the problems challenging primary music education as regards curriculum. Onyiuke (2005:16), bemoaned the non-inclusion of music experts in curriculum planning. Aninwene (2009: 50), alerted that the current music curriculum is an extension of the type introduced by the missionaries being too Western. For instance, stated in the Federal Government Curriculum for Cultural and Creative Arts for Primary 1-3,( 2007) as music course content are:

Melodic patterns of a music

Styles of making melody

Singing in tonic solfa

All these are vague and hardly meaningful to a child who is used to traditional musical activities like, *akpankolo*, *kpunkpunkpuogene*, etc, and who finds them more fulfilling.

Onyiuke (2006) complains that:

The Nigerian primary school system has been oscillating between modes of curriculum so much that it is usually difficult to ascertain its indigenous character. Sometimes the curriculum borrows the British tradition, perhaps in response to our colonial past, and at other times it takes on concepts which are abstract and highly impossible in developing learners’ musical skills (p.1). The point stressed is that the content of primary music education as embedded in the curriculum is too foreign to our children as it does not fully integrate our cultural values. On the same note, Mbanugo (2005:108), explains that: “the songs children sing during their leisure while at school pointed to the cultural hopes, beliefs and aspirations of their native community. They clearly portrayed their community’s norms and values.” He argues further that: The data revealed that the things the children were doing outside their former classroom work were not determined by the primary school curriculum of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) but by the children’s personal and collective interests.. (p.108).

Ekwueme (2009:33), considered the embedding of music as part of cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) a problem. In fact Aninwene (2009) called for the splitting up of the contents of CCA:

The curriculum of music education in the primary schools calls for a serious review to make it utilitarian. Music should be separated with Art and Drama. The curriculum should be known as music curriculum for primary schools. This should incorporate rudiments and theory of music and practice. Emphasis should be laid much on practical musicianship, music creativity and execution. Nigerian and African music should be given the pride of place (p.60).

From the aforementioned, we can identify some cardinal problems with the current music curriculum for primary schools as follows:

- It has Western orientation.
- Its cultural content is poor.
- It has no provision for the learning behavior of children.
- It holds no feature for music being merged with other subjects.
- It lacks the expertise of music professionals.

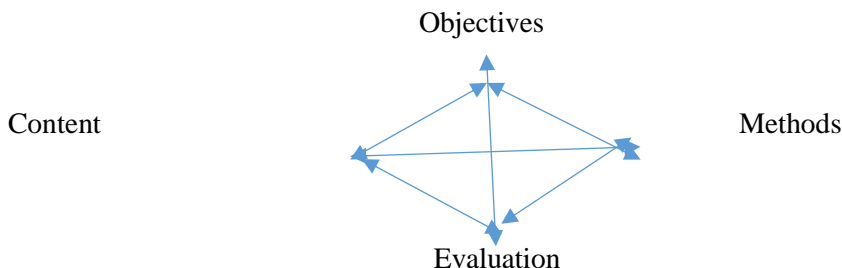
### Developing an Empirical Music Curriculum

Leonhard and House (1972) explains that “curriculum deals with the selection of desired educational outcomes and learning experiences to achieve these outcomes” (p.24). Maduewesi (1993), believes that:

The curriculum at any school level, remains the traditional, official and authentic content that translates the expectations of the society into bits of knowledge, skills and attitude that should be transmitted to learners within a given program or course in both the formal school and non-formal system (p.5).

She also noted that “the curriculum plays the middle-man for the society in relation to the learner”. It can be deduced that a curriculum is a white paper on a given subject which embodies objectives needed to influence positively, the behavior of a learner (p.5).

On curriculum development, Nicholls & Nicholls (1978) opine that, “... the planning of learning opportunities, intended to bring about certain changes in pupils and the assessment of the extent to which these changes have taken place is what is meant by curriculum development” (p.14). They further explained by saying that, “curriculum development has four elements that share close relationship.” (p.16)



According to them, “the diagram above shows that the objectives of any curriculum can be achieved through certain stipulated methods with an evaluation to check whether the objectives of the content were realized or not” (p.17). Gbenedio in Onyiuke (2006), sees a curriculum as “a combination of objectives of instruction, the

materials of instruction, the various learning experiences offered to the students and the evaluation of everything involved in the planning and execution of school program’ (p.34). It then follows that the acid test for any curriculum is the outcome of the evaluation of the objectives it is believed to realize.

On music curriculum, Nye & Nye (1970) assert that “A properly designed music curriculum will be concerned with knowledge, understanding, attitude and skills” (p.108). The above assertion is in tune with the objectives of the current curriculum on Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) (2007:iv) which aims to :

- Achieve Universal Basic Education in the training of future generations of Nigeria.
- Encourage partnership among Nigerians in promoting our rich cultural heritage and creativity
- Infuse certain emergent issues such as gender sensitivity, world globalization, health issues, etc .
- Re-orientate Nigerians to have positive values for the enhancement and development of the Nigerian society; and
- To properly equip young Nigerians with manipulative skills which will make them self-reliant job creators.

So far these objectives are quite promising. But just like most educational projects in the nation, the problem is not with the stated objectives but with the content and methods of implementation. The content of our music curriculum should be sensitive to and integrate the musical needs of the children for it to be fruitful.

Nye and Nye (1970) underscored this thus:

Good planning is flexible, not rigid or over-prescriptive. Children can and should have a part in the planning of selected experiences. However, it is unsound to believe that a music curriculum should be planned entirely by the children; the responsibility for planning instructional programs is an adult task. When children have a part in formulating some of the objective, that are meaningful to them, they can be highly motivated to work to realize them (p.108). Onuora-Oguno (2007), advocated for the integration of elements of cultural music into the education of the Nigerian child. He argues that the images evoked by minstrels in their lyrics are powerful tools for music education (p.71).

### **The Problem of Implementation**

The feasibility of any curriculum lies on its implementation methodology. This has been the bane of the nation’s educational policies. It is enough to have laudable educational objectives; they should be followed up and realized through a formidable implementation strategy. The problem of implementation is traceable to two distinctive groups: the government and ‘teachers’ of music.

### **Government as stumbling Block to curriculum implementation**

The Nigerian government has been playing politics with the implementation of the contents of music curriculum in the primary schools. The government through the ministry of education periodically rolls out white paper on educational policies, making so many promises and raising the hopes of teachers and learners but without any concrete arrangement on ground towards the implementation. Stated in the music

curriculum is the provision and use of such teaching and learning materials like tape recorder, music player, piano, drums, flutes, costumes, e.tc. But, very few public schools in Anambra State can boast of a piano keyboard (pkd) how much more with the rest of the teaching/learning materials? Aninwene (2009) laments by saying that “there is no preparation on ground for the teachers and students in terms of adequate facilities, and instructional materials” (p.1). It then goes that the achievement of the objectives of any curriculum is through a reasonable implementation strategy.

### **Teacher Incompetency as Problem to Curriculum Implementation**

It is important to draw a line here between what the researcher refers to as ‘teachers of music’ and ‘music teachers’. One of the problems militating against an empirical music curriculum and music education in Anambra primary schools in general is the handling of the subject by quacks. In most primary schools in the state, music is taught as ordinary singing during closing periods by any designated teacher (Onwuekwe, 1998), and these is the group we refer to as ‘teachers of music’. They have little or no formal experience in music and thus cannot interpret the music curriculum appropriately, if they ever refer to it. The result is that music as a subject becomes more uninteresting and is mangled up with a lot of misconceptions and misinterpretations.

Ekwueme (2009) observes that “one of the major problems of teaching music in the primary school is that teachers are generalists. They are general classroom teachers who do not specialize in any discipline” (p.37). She argues further that “if a teacher has a zero or poor background in any or all of the four areas that make up Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA)- Music, Art, Dance, and Drama- he will certainly not be able to teach either CCA or music”. The point made is that music is a sensitive and complex subject and therefore should be handled by qualified and competent personnel to make it meaningful to the pupils. Here, the music curriculum faces not the problem of interpretation. It takes a qualified and competent music teacher to interpret the musical ideas packaged in the curriculum so that the learners can benefit from it.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has endeavored to show that the basic problems associated with the current curriculum for primary schools border on content and implementation. The content of the curriculum has been found too Western, insensitive to the learning behavior of children, entwines music with other subjects (Fine art, Dance and Drama) thereby giving music an imprisoned status. Also the government has failed on its parts by not providing enough teaching/learning materials. Schools, on their part, have helped compound the problem by leaving music instruction to be handled by incompetent people. The curriculum also lacks the expert contributions of music experts. On content, the researcher recommends the indirect involvement of children in the new curriculum planning by way of observing their musical behaviors and preferences as regards games, folktales, recreation, etc. and integrating them in the curriculum for it to make meaning and be impactful on them.

Concerning implementation problem halting the curriculum, the government is challenged to live up to its promises by providing adequate instructional/ learning facilities and materials. Also music teaching should be handled by qualified and

competent personnel for proper interpretation of the curriculum for effective music teaching/learning.

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