

ENCULTURATION OF INDIGENOUS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: A TALKING DRUM EXPOSITION BY NON-YORUBA SPEAKING PUPILS OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S PRIMARY SCHOOL ENUGU

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Abstract

To most Nigerian children and African children at large, playing rhythms on indigenous percussive instruments seems to be a very simple and easy task to embark on and of which they are ready to do as they enjoy doing so. The reason being that it has being part of their lives since birth. At birth, many of them were lulled to bed/pacified with songs sang or hummed by the mother or care-giver. Many of them grew up in local communities where they had opportunities to interact with objects that can make sounds which they assemble, and play with fun, as their own amateur instrumental ensemble having watched and sometimes participated in different musical performances in their respective communities. However, as simple as some African percussion instruments look in design, empirical evidences have shown that they are not so easy to manipulate by everyone. Producing a coherent simple rhythmic motif in accompanying simple African songs becomes a herculean task. In addition, it is expected that the knowledge gained in learning an indigenous instrument should be transferred to the playing of another even if it is from another region or tribe. In an attempt to enculturate the Talking drum, this study is aimed at experimenting the teaching of Talking drum - an indigenous musical instruments found among the Yoruba of western Nigeria, to pupils of Igbo tribe. Participant observation method of data collection was employed. The paper highlighted some challenges faced in teaching non-Yoruba pupils the talking drum. These includes age of learners, time, genetical tone familiarity, availability of the instrument among others. Some of the solutions proffered includes vocalization, adoption of psychomotor exercises and use of non-musical instruments for beginners.

Keywords - Talking drum, Non-Yoruba, Reflex, Psychomotor.

Introduction

Music is a well-established medium of instruction which contributes to the general growth and development of the child. Music has gained acceptance into the school curriculum of most country of the world. The reason for this is that music is considered

as a subject which has enormous values needed in the educational program/scheme of a child. When children are given the right attention from the start of their lives from their family and society, and especially with music, their general development in all areas: especially intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual are obviously enhanced (Esimone, 2013:206).

The application of music as an educational tool cuts across formal and informal setting. Music education has been considered a very useful discipline dating from the era of great philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pestalozzi and Lowell Mason who are often referred to as the fathers of music education. Therefore, music is as old as man, which is passed from one generation to another. Music has been described as a way of knowing. According to Harvard psychologist, Gardner (1983), "Music intelligence is equal in importance to logic - Mathematics intelligence, Linguistic intelligence, Spatial intelligence, Bodily-kinetic intelligence (and) interpersonal intelligence". To buttress this fact, Armstrong (1994) opines "Intelligence is galvanized by participating in some kind of culturally valued activity and that the individuals' growth in such an activity follows a developmental pattern; each activity has its own time arising in early childhood" (p. 5). Music is as such important as a basic life skill as walking or talking. Peery and Peery (1987) suggest "It is desirable for children to be exposed to trained in and be enculturated with music for its own sake. That is, it is a birthright for all people to be able to sing in tune and march to a beat" (p. 83).

Background to the Study

When early mission schools were established during the colonial era, the curriculum of the schools were broadened to include hymn singing, Harmonium playing, festivals, concerts and competitions.

Private schools are known for competition among themselves. Therefore, novel innovations are one aspect the school management does not toil with. The management of the schools does everything within their reach to birth and nurture creative ideas that put the school ahead of other schools in order to have something special and spectacular to market the school.

They organize different programs in which parents and friends are invited. It is at these events that the pupils/students are made to exhibit what they have to the satisfaction and amazement of the cheering audience. One of such avenues to showcase these creative ideas is during graduation/end of session party. At this occasion, schools through the pupils showcase all they have learnt while giving preference to special presentations that are new and are viewed 'uncommon' among other schools. These are done to the satisfaction of parents and prospective parents whom they do everything through their presentations to convince that they are better than others. Also at this period, most private school administrators are always eager and ready to release fund to sponsor i. e. get all things needed for the presentations as long as it will project and 'market' the school. Ironically, these are the same school administrators that give excuses and are very reluctant in equipping the schools' music room. Most often, after

the purchase of a keyboard, they leave the music teacher to perform magic as regards other musical instruments needed for a qualitative music education.

It is at such a period like this that the management of St. Bartholomew's Primary School Enugu threw a challenge at the researcher. The challenge was to prepare pupils for a music presentation involving the Talking Drum which in their view is novel considering the ethnic background of the said pupils. Definitely, this is a form of enculturation - adapting and transmission of aspects of culture different from the original cultural values of the said people.

History of St. Bartholomew's School Enugu

St. Bartholomew's Primary School Enugu started as a nursery school in September 1985. The school is located at St. Bartholomew's Church Compound, Asata, Enugu. St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church is located at the heart of Enugu metropolis. The Establishment of the school was initiated by St. Bartholomew's Women General Meeting. The first proprietor was Late Captain L. C. Okeke who was the Provost of St. Bartholomew's Cathedral, as it was then. The first Headmistress was Mrs. A. U. Eduzor with Mrs. Gladys Onuigbo assisting.

The nominal roll of the pupils was 60 and the teachers were Mrs. A. U. Eduzor - Nursery 3 teacher/Headmistress, Mrs. Gladys Onuigbo - Nursery 2 teacher/Assistant Headmistress, Aunty Kate Nwachukwu (Late) - Nursery 1.

The first Graduation ceremony of the school was held in July 1986 where all the pupils in Nursery 3 graduated.

Succession of Headmistress

- Mrs. A. U. Eduzor 1985 - 2001
- Mrs. Nwagbala (Late) 2001 - 2005
- Mrs. Chinedu Ogbonna 2005 - 2008
- Mrs. Evelyn Obiora 2009 till date

The primary school section of the school took off officially on the 22nd September 1997. The school rose to having two streams of Primary one with Mrs. Uzoamaka Ajumobi and Mrs. Catherine Nwankwo as teachers. In the 1998/1999 academic year, the school on its resumption on 14th September, had increase in number of pupils and staff.

The School presented her first candidates for Common Entrance Examination on the 24th February, 2000 and had its first graduation ceremony on 17th July 2001. The school being a mission school has been serious with moral upkeep of little children in its care. Also, it has witnessed tremendous growth over the years and has progressed to the establishment of a secondary section.

The present population of the school is 215 pupils and 11 staff. The Nursery School was approved by the Enugu State Ministry of Education on 27th June 2000 (School Dedication Programme of Events, p. 7).



Fig 1: St. Bartholomew's Primary School Building



Fig. 2: St. Bartholomew's Schl. Sign Post

The Talking Drum

Nigerian Traditional Musical instruments abound in their hundreds and vary from one locality to another. However, they perform the same function in their different area (Onwuekwe, 2011:56). For many years, the talking drum has been noted as one of the symbols of the old African tradition and an instrument of music predominant among Yoruba culture of Southwest Nigeria. Although, instruments likened to the talking drum can be found among other tribes in Nigeria, the features of *Gangan* stands it out from other musical instruments categorized as speech surrogate. Onwuekwe (2011) notes ". . . *Gangan* which is very integral to music in parts of southern Nigeria is likened to *Kalangu* of the Northern parts" (p. 56). Chukwu (2011) adds, "There is special specie of African membrane drum that has different names according to the ethnic group, and is generally called 'the talking drum'" (p. 8).

The Talking drum is an hourglass drum. It has head covered with animal skin on both ends. The drummer has to beat the head with a stick called *Kongo* to create sound. The tone/pitch of the instrument is adjusted by tightening and releasing the *Osan* (Thongs) which is arranged horizontally around the body of the instrument. In his description of talking drum, Okafor (2005) submits:

The hour glass tension "talking drum", found in areas of Moslem culture influence in Nigeria, is perhaps the best known of Nigeria's talking drums. It is double-headed in this respect that a wooden cylinder is covered with goat skin at each end. Leather straps connect the binding cords at each drum head. Pressure on the leather straps increases the tension on the leather head and a higher pitch result if the leather head is beaten with a stick. Thus, varying the pressure produces various pitches resulting from varied tension (p. 170).

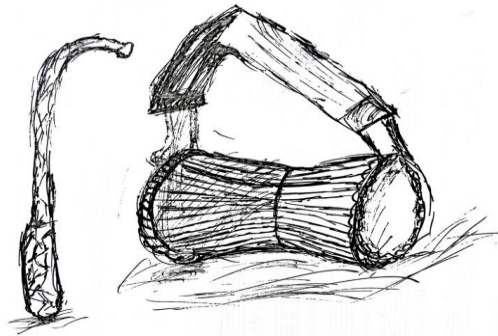


Fig. 3: A Talking drum

Yoruba language is a tonal language that speaks in proverbs where a word alone will not suffice. The talking drum speaks in tones that are adjusted with leather cord that run the length of the body of the drum. Its tone has the ability to mimic the spoken word; hence it is usually a talking drum. Several other cultures play beautiful musical instruments visually resembling the talking drum (Jayeola, 2014:33). A master player of the Nigerian talking drum conveys litany of messages through the power of its 'spoken word'. The talking drum has been an important presence in all aspect of African life, especially the Yoruba ethnic group. The drum is used at birth, in ancestral worship, rites of passage, healing, storytelling, warriors' rites and initiation, at the time of death and more importantly as a means of communication. Nketia (1998) in Jayeola (2014) says, "in addition to membrane instrument, the sound of membranophone instrument may function as speech surrogates or as signals (call signals, warning signals etc)" (p. 33). An important consideration in the design and construction of drums is the question of tone quality and pitch. The choice of different shapes and sizes of drums as well as the choice of drum heads and methods of holding the head are generally made with this in mind. Sometimes additional devices are used to get specific qualities of sound.

According to Timothy (2006), in his book: *African Talking Drums: More than just a Musical instrument*, the World's portable phone in Jayeola (2014):

The instrument talking drum is an African instrument, often with an hourglass shape, and often used in African music recordings. But there is reason they are called talking drum. Unlike some other instrument which sent smoke signal, however, which basically sent generic messages. Talking drum can be used to approximately the spoken language and under the most ideal of condition complex dialogue can take place between drummer who tense about five miles away and then passed on from drummer to drummer to the villages that are father away (p. 34).

The use of talking drum as a medium of communication was used to its greatest extent by those people who live in such West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria. The talking drums works well to communicate highly developed thoughts because the actual spoken languages of these African tribes have a tonal component in them, in which each syllable of a particular word contains a different pitch. The talking drum can be used

quite offensively to mimic these pitches and since language has a natural rhythm anyway, drums are particularly apt for communication. Obviously, anyone using a talking drum would have to possess what is called perfect pitch by music teacher and the use of a drum to communicate would not balance at all with language that is not dependent on tonal difference such as English. If a talking drum were played in a way that mimicked English, all we would know upon hearing it, would be how many syllables in each word. The Talking drum has its own ensemble which comprises of five drums of different sizes: *Iya Ilu*, *Gangan*, *Omele Isaju*, *Omele Ako*, and *Omele Abo*.

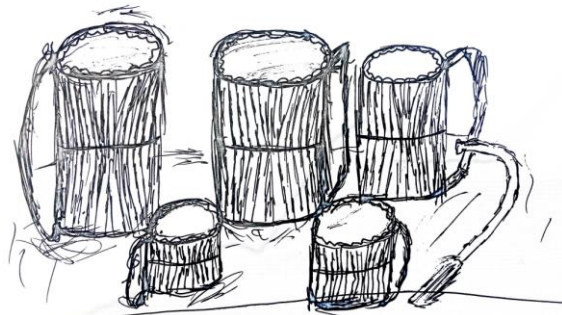


Fig. 4: Different sizes of the Talking drum ensemble

The Type of Talking Drum used in the Study

The type of talking drum used in this study is *Gangan* supported by *Omele Ako* and *Omele Abo*. The choice of *Gangan* is due to its size which is portable for the pupils to carry. The age range of the pupils is between 11 and 13, and this constrained the researcher to use these three members of the talking drum ensemble.

Preparing Pupils for Talking Drum Presentation – The Challenges

The task of preparing non-Yoruba speaking pupils for Talking drum presentation presents a lot of challenges to the researcher and surmounting the challenges is a must.

Some of the challenges are as follows:

- i. **The Age Factor** - The age range of the pupils used in the course of this work is between 11yr - 13yr. If it were to be older pupils, there is possibility that they will grasp the teaching faster.
- ii. **Availability of Instrument** - This poses a serious challenge as good *Gangan* is not available for purchase in the eastern part of the country. Therefore, it has to be purchased in the south western part and transported to the east. A lot of damages can occur during this process because the instruments may be packed with other materials or objects.
- iii. **Time Frame** - In the typical African setting, learning of musical instrument is done through tutelage. And this process spans through months and years for one to be a master drummer. Therefore, taking pupils who are preoccupied with other school lessons and activities through the process of learning and presentation within few weeks is a bit challenging.
- iv. **Maintenance** - The price of the cheapest talking drum cost about fifteen thousand naira (#15,000) and any damage to the face of the instrument renders it useless as the pitch is distorted. The fact that the production of the instrument is not done around eastern part of the country makes the repairs to be difficult to carry out in good time.

v. **Methodology** - Just like other African musical instrument, there is no laid down step by step methodology to be followed in teaching talking drum, as it is obtained in learning western musical instruments. African instrument trainees learn through observation.

vi. **Genetical Tone Familiarity** - It is very easy for a student of an Igbo origin to appreciate and interpret the sound of an *Oja* (an aerophone musical instrument predominantly found among the Igbo tribe of Southeast Nigeria). Same goes to a student of Yoruba extraction to understand the message a talking drum is passing across. However, it might be a bit tedious when we swap ethnic background and musical instruments.

vii. **Insubstantial Musical Background** - In Nigeria, there are three categories of school management (owners) - Government, Private and Mission. As stated at the beginning of this research, music teaching thrives in private schools in Nigeria. However, implicitly the main reason why most schools leave music on their time table is to serve as a marketing strategy. Therefore, there is no serious attention given to effective teaching of the subject among other schools due to the financial implications of purchasing musical instruments. As a result of this, the pupils used in this study are lacking in basic rudiments of music.

viii. **Reflex Coordination** - In manipulating the talking drum used in this study, the left armpit and the right wrist are engaged. This poses a serious challenge as the pupils were not able to easily determine the level of force to apply in controlling the pitch if the instrument under the armpit. The wrist and the armpit function together in achieving the desired tones. Most times the pupils tend to concentrate on the armpit while forgetting the wrist and vice versa.

Similarities between the Tonality of Yoruba drums and Igbo drums

Membrane drums in Africa and Nigeria in particular do not possess a definite pitch. Nevertheless, various pitches can be obtained from the instrument depending on how/and the dexterity at which it is played. In the introduction to his book "African Membrane and its Notation" Chukwu (2011) asserts:

The tones emitted from membrane drum can be high (/), low (\) or medium (-), depending on the size and style of sound production. However, most African drums are capable of producing these three basic tones. This is evident because African languages are based on the three tonal levels (p. 19).

Therefore, an attempt can be made in using a speech surrogate instrument prevalent in one ethnic group in another.



Fig. 5: Talking Drum playing position

Approaches adopted in teaching Talking Drum as Igbo Speech Surrogate - Overcoming the Challenges

Below is one of the motifs given to pupils to play on the talking drum:

Chukwu Okike Daalu

In Music Education, many methods have been developed over the years, for effective music learning. Some of the methods are: i. Kodaly Method, ii. Carl Orff Schulwerk Method, iii. Suzuki Method, iv. Dalcroze Eurhythmics, v. Carabo-cone Method, vi. Contemporary Music Project, and vii. Individualized Instruction in Music (Nnamani & Odunuga, 2005:59).

1. In the course of this study, some part of John Curwen's hand sign adopted by Zoltan Kodaly was used to help the pupils control their responses (reflex action).

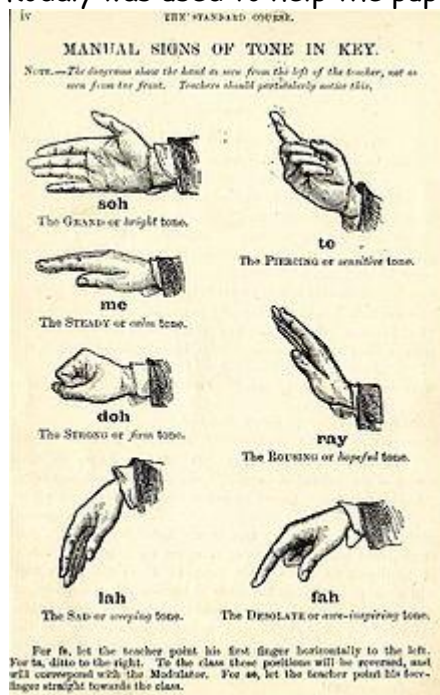


Fig. 5: John Curwen's Hand Signs
(Source: Internet)

This was done with concentration on the three pitches of the talking drum which are: low tone (Tonic), the medium tone (Mediant) and the high tone (Dominant).



Fig. 6: John Curwen's Hand Signs Applicable to Talking Drum

The aim of this exercise is to make a distinct departure from the normal singing of tonic solfa of the pentatonic scale and have an activity that the tonic solfa singing will be accompanied with.

2. Vocalization was given prominence. Different 'tongue-twisters' were designed based on the three tones of the talking drum. Attempt was made to relate the pupils' names and some Igbo words to these tones. This the pupils found very exciting. With this, they can conceive the tones of some words in their mind without being told.

3. The pupils were made to clap the sound of the words and rhythms to be played on the talking drum. With this, they got accustomed to the movement of the 'piece' to be played.

4. The pupils were given some other sound producing materials to try their hands on before giving them the talking drum to manipulate. This is to prevent damage of the Talking Drum as it is their first time of handling such.

5. The pupils were instructed to play very soft. The aim of this is to prevent them from applying too much pressure on the instrument.



Fig. 7: The researcher explaining the use of Kongo (Beater) to the pupils.



Fig. 8: The Researcher teaching the pupils of St. Bartholomew's Primary School, Enugu.

Conclusion

Children of primary school age are always ready to assimilate knowledge, the teacher only needs to simplify the study for them. Following the sequence of approaches stated above, the pupils were able to play the talking drum and also able to say something through it. It is believed that if Africans can proficiently learn to play western musical instruments like piano, guitar, flute, trumpet etc, then we can do same with other African musical instruments even though they do not belong to our culture or ethnic group. Therefore, there is lot of work to be done by African music scholars in developing a step-by-step guide to learn our local musical instruments just as we have in the western world. Music enculturation should be encouraged among students of music in our tertiary institutions especially at this period when scholars are canvassing for the use of indigenous knowledge system in music education.

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