

COMPLEMENTING SCHOOL MUSIC ASSESSMENT WITH AFRICA-SENSED METHODS AT THE BASIC SCHOOLS: A PROPOSAL

Calista A. N. Ugwu, Ph.D.
and
Eunice N. Ahanotu, Ph.D.

Introduction

Assessment permeates every aspect of human endeavor, a prelude for achieving success. For this discourse, it is an art of examining student musical performance and attainment from the traditional school perspective and African point of view. Literature has critiqued school assessment hence some country has made music “unexaminable” subject at the basic level. The proposition of this discourse therefore was instead of shelving a crucial aspect of life – assessment-the school assessment should be complemented with indigenous assessment as both play important role in the life of the student at this globalized era where the student has to be well groomed in his/her culture to maintain distinctiveness and at the same time well informed in the knowledge of the wider world.

Assessment

Assessment as an aspect of the school curriculum vary in its use and application ranging from: Assessment: the collection of information about a student’s status; Authentic assessment: the assessment of students through a task that could exist in the “real world” outside of the classroom; Evaluation: the comparison of student outcomes to a pre-established measure; Formative assessment: collection of information used by teachers and students to determine the next steps in the learning process, also called “assessment for learning”; Measurement: the use of predetermined, precise methods to collect student

information and represent the level of “performance capability, task completion, or concept attainment”; Summative assessment: collection of information used to determine the level of student achievement (Asumus, 1999; Brophy, 2000 and Faulthy, 2010). Though these scholars situated their review within a school context they were not different from what were obtained in the indigenous setting hence either in the school or outside, the objective of the assessment determines the particular type of assessment to be adopted. For the purpose of this discourse, all these aspects of assessment are relational however the main focus was on the synergistic approach whereby the school and the indigenous were amalgamated.

African Music Education

Early scholars including Dewey (1934) and Merriam (1964) have shown in their writings that music is, at an intellectual and emotional level, a construct of culture, and as such, a product of society. Taking this theory, a step further, particular music is a construct of a particular society. Africa music would, for instance, be associated with the African lifestyle and thus is the product of such a society.

Towards grooming African child in her culture Tedla, 1995 introduced a concept ‘Sankofan education’ which is stated as African centered education anchored in indigenous African thought that judiciously borrows ideas and technologies from other people of the world and thus, her cornerstone attributes rest on: 1) African cultural heritage, 2) the transcending of ethnic and national blinders to appreciate the relatedness of the African world community experience, 3) the placement of Africa and African values at the center of investigation, 4) the preparation of learners to contribute to society, and 5) five acquisitive goals concerning: cultural and academic excellence, spiritual development, community building, and physical fitness and health (Tedla, 1995:209-211). The school ideally, should educate the African child towards circumventing the ‘uncritical and often unconscious negative images about Africa that has led the young to value sensibilities of Africa by Western values, and thus devaluate the traditional African way of life’ (Tedla, 1995).

Adopting “Sankofan” education by Tedla, (1995), Africa sense music education should focus on the transmission of values and accumulated knowledge of a society hence it is a societal instrument for expansion of human culture (Zulu,

2006). An African education anchored in indigenous African thought. Nzewi (2010) lending his voice to what Zulu said above stated that African indigenous musical arts is underscored by a soft science of humanity and society management. Indigenous African musical arts is purposive driven when he stated that the 'generic philosophical conceptualizations, theoretical rationalizations and humanity science principles mark creative intention and logic as well as performance grammar' (p.20).

African music as stated by Mapaya (2014) is as diverse as its cultures and peoples and has flowered in many indigenous forms as well as been shaped by foreign influences. The concept of music in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa bears a difference from other regions and cultures. The roles of music and dance are tightly woven together in sub-Saharan African, and music intersects with every aspect of life, expresses life through the medium of sound. By helping mark, the important moments in life, music helps to underscore the divine and eternal value of human life. African music also helps to connect people together in a variety of ways, strengthening the fabric of the community, toward mutual health and prosperity (Mapaya, 2014:2). The import of this section of the review was the establishment of the humanity wellbeing of the musical arts and communal nature of the art that should serve as the main objective of assessment towards complementing the school assessment that is mainly Western in perspective.

Theoretical framework

African musical arts is a communal art. Everybody's effort is appreciated and commended. Pulse, sharing, complementary, inter-borrowing, space (Nzewi, 2010) are some concepts that inform the African musical creating, performing, analyzing. The philosophical underpinning is the humanity well being and societal management (Nzewi, 2010). The emphasis of African musical arts is more on the group performance unlike the individuality of the hegemony culture. While the western societies focus on the artistic aesthetic of the individual that emerges one as the superstar, the African musical arts projects beyond the artistic to the humanity and community wellness through the musical expertise of the group.

Hence an *Igbo* concept *igwe bu ike* meaning 'group is power'. More so, African music is an oral tradition. The literacy imperative should complement the research-sensed orientated theory-in-practice activities appropriate in hummaning

school musical arts education. This will entail oral cum literacy analysis of cultural samples as well as learners' original performative creations of own or cultural models (Nzewi, 2019).

School Music Assessment

School music assessment as a concept vary in its use and application ranging from: Assessment: the collection of information about a student's status; Authentic assessment: the assessment of students through a task that could exist in the "real world" outside of the classroom; Evaluation: the comparison of student outcomes to a pre-established measure; Formative assessment: collection of information used by teachers and students to determine the next steps in the learning process, also called "assessment for learning"; Measurement: the use of predetermined, precise methods to collect student information and represent the level of "performance capability, task completion, or concept attainment"; Summative assessment: collection of information used to determine the level of student achievement (Asumus, 1999; Brophy, 2000 and Faulthy, 2010). Crucial to any form of assessment is its validity and reliability.

Music educators have different opinions about music assessment, while some scholars deem it necessary others disagree and no doubt this might have prompted to having music as "unexaminable" subject in some African countries like Kenya. Literature reveal that several researchers have investigated elementary music teachers' beliefs about the importance of assessment and have found that while most teachers believe assessment is important in elementary general music, some believe it is unimportant. Peppers (2010) found that "most respondents disagreed with the statement, 'Assessment is not a valuable tool in my classroom,' although 5 participants strongly agreed". In Barkley's study (2006), 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to assess the national standards in the elementary general music classroom, while 18% did not. Among Hepworth-Osiowy's (2004) respondents, 28.5% did not agree with the statement "Assessment is an important part of my music program," and 12.5% agreed that "Music is a subject where assessment is not critical." In addition, 6.8% agreed with the statement "I believe there are few or no benefits for both students and teachers who use assessment in the music program".

The musical knowledge/skill, music aptitude and nonmusical factor were the most commonly assessed music content using different forms of music assessment. Researchers such as Rasor (1988) surveyed elementary music teachers in Ohio, 88% of whom reported assessing students' singing. In an investigation of curricular alignment practices among fifty-nine fifth-grade general music teachers in Texas, Shih (1997) found that singing objectives were the most thoroughly assessed curricular objectives, with participants reporting that they assess 93% of the state-mandated singing objectives. Barkley (2006) surveyed 255 elementary music teachers in Michigan on their assessment of the national standards and discovered that singing was the most frequently assessed standard, with 90% of respondents reporting that they frequently assess singing. In Shih's (1997) study, participants reported assessing 83% of the state-mandated listening objectives in the curriculum, while 45% of Barkley's (2006) respondents reported assessing the listening/analyzing standard. Movement is another commonly assessed content area, as evidenced by 78% of Shih's participants reporting that they assess the state-mandated movement objectives and 59% of Rasor's (1988) respondents reporting that they assess movement. Music notation skills are also commonly assessed in elementary music. Shih's participants reported assessing 65% of state-mandated notation objectives in the curriculum, while 52% of Barkley's respondents reported assessing the notation standard. Rasor's participants reporting that they assess 61% of the instrumental performance objectives in the curriculum. In a survey of thirty-five elementary general music teachers in Michigan, Talley (2005) found that teachers assessed performance-based musical skills (such as beat competency and singing voice development).

Some studies choose to assess students' music aptitude. In a survey of one hundred elementary general music teachers in Washington, McQuarrie and Sherwin (2013) found that only 3% of teachers said they use music aptitude tests, while 80% declined using these measures. Similarly, only two of Rasor's (1988) respondents reported measurement of students' music aptitude through use of a published test. It can be deduced from the findings that few music teachers assess students' music aptitudes.

In a survey of twenty-one elementary general music teachers in one Michigan county, Patterson (2006) found that 86% reported that they assess factors such as

behavior, participation, cooperation, attitude, and effort. Similarly, participation, effort, and attitude accounted for three of the four most frequently assessed areas reported by respondents in Lane's (2007) survey of 129 grade 3 music teachers in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Furthermore, many elementary music teachers believe these nonmusical factors should be the main basis for students' music grades (Barkley 2006; Carter 1986; Farmer 2004). Barkley (2006) found that 74% of elementary music teachers agreed that student participation and effort are the most important factors to consider when assigning grades. These findings suggest that some elementary music teachers may allow effort or participation to override musical skills or knowledge when assigning grades. There are many forms of assessments reported by literature which includes written tasks/tests, ratings scales, rubrics, checklists, published measures/standardized tests, portfolios, student self-assessment, informal observation, and group performance.

Rasor (1988), Hepworth-Osiowy (2004), and Livingston (2000) reported that written tasks/test were the most common used form of music assessment, with 70%–93% of participants reporting use of such measures. In addition to quantitative studies, qualitative studies also reveal frequent use of written tasks/tests as a form of assessment in elementary general music. Nightingale Abell (1993) found that all three of her participants assessed students through some form of written work to some degree, with one teacher assessing all students in grades 1 through 5 in written form.

This increase in the use of written assessments may indicate that teachers value conceptual knowledge over performance skills, or it may simply be that written assessments are easier to mark. Twelve Sandwich in-service music teachers at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, interviewed during their 2016/2017 session concurred that written assessment is what they use. The two most commonly used by them were objectives and essay types. Some of their reasons were that the school authorities mandated them to use the two forms while some choose them because they are less tedious to mark. Other researchers, Shih (1997) found that written tests were used more frequently to assess listening and notation objectives than for singing or movement objectives, and Barkley (2006) found that written tests were used much more frequently to assess the

reading/notating standard than to assess the singing, playing, and improvisation standards.

(Hepworth-Osiowy 2004; Livingston 2000; Nightingale Abell 1993; Rasor 1988), investigated on the use of other forms of assessment in music using rating scales, rubrics, and checklists. McQuarrie and Sherwin (2013) found that 83% of respondents reported that they “frequently use” or “sometimes use” a rubric or rating scale to assess individual student performance, while only 17% “almost never use” or “do not use” these tools. Similarly, 71.6% of the eighty-eight elementary music teachers in Winnipeg surveyed by Hepworth-Osiowy (2004) reported using checklists to assess their students, 68.1% reported using rubrics, and 55.7% reported using rating scales.

“Standardized tests and textbook tests” were the least used forms of assessment among Lane’s (2007) respondents, and only 8% of the teachers in Rasor’s (1988) study reported using standardized tests for student assessment. Only 1% of McQuarrie and Sherwin’s (2013) respondents reported that they “frequently use” standardized achievement tests, while 91% reported that they “do not use” or “almost never use” these tests. Talley (2005) found the use of commercially available tests a bit more common among her respondents, with 28% reporting use of such tests.

Several researchers (Barkley 2006; Lane 2007; Livingston 2000; Patterson 2006) have found observation to be the most commonly used form of assessment among elementary music teachers, and “systematic observation/roaming” was the most frequently used assessment strategy among Hepworth-Osiowy’s (2004) participants. McQuarrie and Sherwin (2013) found that more teachers reported assessing students’ individual performance through informal observation than through use of a rubric or rating scale. Similarly, 100% of Patterson’s (2006) respondents reported assessing through observation and only 29% through a rating scale. However, 57% reported they use checklists and rating scales in response to being asked which tools they use “when recording assessment data”.

Findings of several researchers suggest that many elementary general music teachers choose to assess students in a group rather than individually, particularly when assessing singing objectives. Both Shih (1997) and McQuarrie and Sherwin

(2013) found that group performance was the most frequently reported mode of assessment. In a survey of 461 elementary music teachers in Oklahoma, Carter (1986) found that solo singing was used infrequently, while only one of the four elementary music teachers in Delaney's (2011) qualitative study incorporated individual singing. Similarly, two of the three participants in Nightingale Abell's (1993) study most often assessed the performance of the class as a group. Among Shih's (1997) participants, reasons given for assessing students as a group included time, class size, and the "sensitivity" of the students.

Summarizing the reviewed literature, it could be deduced that music assessment in the classroom in the western culture deals with the separate aspect of music: singing, notation, listening, improvisation, reading, movement and so forth. They also use various forms of assessment such as written tests, rating scales, standardized tests, rubrics, textbooks, checklists, informal observations etcetera. The situation is not quite different from the area of this study where assessment involved mostly written form of assessment.

Indigenous Music Assessment

The general form of assessment in the indigenous music is the group/individual performance which is done orally. Group performance precedes individual performance. Even though it is the individual expertise that culminates into quality group performance yet it is the group that is assessed. The good or poor performance is attributed to the group hence whatever form of appreciation in the course of performance given to the soloist or instrumentalist is for the whole group and all member share equally. There is specific assessment of the individual member of the music group that determines what role to be assigned to individual members which is dependent on the creative ability of the individual. For instance, the *egwu teburu* worked with, those members that are very good soloists and instrumentalists are assigned those roles while the less competent ones are assigned handclapping and chorus in their outings. During rehearsals the clappers are assigned higher roles like playing instruments for them to learn and improve on their performance. In the indigenous music assessment, no member is a failure rather everyone contributes his/her own quota towards making the group succeed no matter how little. Nzewi (2010) averred that

as humanity principle, assessment in the learning activities must recognize that the aim of education in African indigenous models is not to produce failures. Every genuine effort, no matter the quality or magnitude deserves to be recognized, encouraged and accorded positive assessment. Emphasis in assessment must give preference to originality and practical activities that inculcate knowledge intellectually as well as bodily/heuristically. Group activities must receive group grade for all participants no matter the extent of input into the final outcome, and should constitute a high percentage (about 70%) of the final assessment mark because of the humanity values/virtues entailed; 30% will go for individual merits or extraordinary demonstration of knowledge or capability especially for solo instrument performers (Nzewi, 2010:37).

Nzewi continues

that about grading, group marks will be earned when a class or team has accomplished tasks in accordance with the African indigenous evaluation principles for crediting collective/community endeavor. In instances of extraordinary contribution extra mark is added to meriting individual/s; in case of consistent delinquent attitude, marks will be deduced from individual's entitlement to group score. Learners on solo instrument of specialization get individual assessment (Nzewi, 2010:40).

Discussions

Music teacher in the context of this discourse is a professionally and culturally certified teacher of music who teaches for the total development of the child. Music is culture-centric hence its teacher must have gained wealth of experience from the music of his/her culture as a culture insider even before embarking on western education for paper qualification or certification. S/he is a teacher of music who understands that his central objective in music teaching is for inculcating the humanity and societal cohesion of the African musical arts without neglecting the artistic expertise of the individual child. The indigenous African mode of instruction is learning through the principle of practice and as such, all the curriculum content must be tailored towards exposing the students towards interacting with music.

Music theory must not be taught in a decontextualized form rather within music context. He/she is trained professionally as an educator and secondly as music specialist from his/her culture. S/he contributes to the general curriculum objectives as does the English or Mathematics teacher to the global development of human beings, especially in the form of an upbringing of tomorrow's music audiences, where artistic and creative abilities are included to school knowledge is linked to the experiential (Arostegui, 2012).

His/her methodology is constantly reflected upon for better strategies. As a culture bearer and school teacher (music teacher) his/her assessment should aim at achieving human wellbeing and societal cohesion without relegating the artistic creativity of the individual. Informal observation via oral assessment should be complemented with written assessment via group and individualistic performance.

Music is culture specific with universalities across cultures. The education of the child through the instrumentality of the school should inculcate cultural and academic excellence, spiritual development, community building, and physical fitness and health (Tedla, 1995). The literature reviewed divulges that the school music assessment tilted towards academic excellence to the neglect of the spiritual development, community building and physical fitness and health which music lends itself so well to inculcate. The position of this paper therefore is the situating this academic excellence in the cultural worldview of humanity and societal cohesion towards Africa-sense. The assessment of such instruction should involve the Africa-sense of not producing a failure but accommodating everyone's capability no matter how little. The informal observation of group performance via oral form of assessment should be incorporated towards complementing the individual musical knowledge assessment via written tests that is majorly used in the classroom.

Conclusion

Music is a cultural subject and the culture has its' peculiar way of music assessment that is informal observation of group performance through oral form. Indigenous music assessment aims to give space for individual capability no matter how little towards the enhancement of the group performance hence no body is a failure. The school being a brain child of western culture assesses music with a focus on the musical knowledge of the individual via written tests. School

assessment has been critiqued as it instigates fear which inhibits learning but indigenous informal observation does not. Instead of making music “unexaminable” subject at the basic schools because of the attendant problem of school assessment, the school music assessment of written musical knowledge should be complemented by indigenous assessment procedure of informal group performance via oral assessment.

References

- Arostegui, J. L. (2012). Evaluating music teacher education programme: Epistemological and methodological foundations. In J. L. Arostegui (Ed) *Educating music teachers for the 21st century*. Pp. 1-10. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers
- Asmus, E. (1999). Music assessment concepts. *Music Educator Journal*, 86 (2): 19–24.
- Barkley, M. (2006). *Assessment of the national standards for music education: A study of elementary general music teacher attitudes and practices*. Master’s thesis, Wayne State University.
- Brophy, T. S. (2000). *Assessing the developing child musician: A guide for general music teachers*. Chicago: GIA Publications.
- Carter, K. G. (1986). *The status of vocal/general music programs in Oklahoma elementary schools*. PhD diss., The University of Oklahom.
- Dewey, J. (1934). *Art as experience*. New York: Minton Balch.
- Encyclopedia <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Music-of-Africa>.
- Farmer, A. D. (2004). *A study of elementary teachers’ use of research-based practices in teaching first and second grade students to Sing*. PhD diss., Shenandoah Conservatory.
- Fautley, M. (2010). *Assessment in music education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hepworth-Osiowy, K. (2004). *Assessment in elementary music education: Perspectives and practices of teachers in Winnipeg public schools*. Master’s Thesis. University of Manitoba.
- Lane, A. M. (2007). Music evaluation: A research study in elementary music education. *Canadian Music Educator* 49 (1): 34–38.
- Livingston, J. J. (2000). *Assessment practices used in Kodaly-based elementary music classrooms*. Master’s thesis. Silver Lake College, London.

- Mapaya, M. G. (2014). A descriptive analysis of Mmino Wa Setso from a Northern Sotho perspective. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences. Italy: MCSER Publishing.*
- McQuarrie, S. H., & Sherwin, R. G. (2013). Assessment in music education: relationships between classroom practice and professional publication topics. *Research & Issues in Music Education* 11 (1). <http://www.stthomas.edu/rimeonline/vol11/mcquarrie.htm>.
- Merriam, A. (1964). *The anthropology of music*. Evanston: North Western University Press.
- Nzewi, M. (1999). *Strategies for music education in Africa: Towards a meaningful program from tradition to modern*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/025576149903300109>
- Nzewi, M. (2007). Re-searching music education for civic activism. *Music Education Research*. 3 (9), pp.305-321.
- Nzewi, M. (2010). *Reinstating the soft science of African indigenous musical arts for humanity-sensed contemporary education and practice*. A paper presented delivered at the UNESCO 2nd World Conference on Arts Education, South Korea.
- Nzewi, M. (2019). *Restoring the pristine humanning potency of music education anchored on stimulating assessment practice*. Paper presented at the 15th annual conference of music educators in Nigeria held at University of Port Harcourt Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria from 13th – 17th May, 2019.
- Patterson, J. R. (2006). *Elementary music assessment and report card practices in Livingston County, Michigan*. Master's thesis. Eastern Michigan University.
- Peppers, M. R. (2010). *An examination of teachers' attitudes toward assessment and their relationship to demographic factors in Michigan elementary general music classrooms*. Master's thesis, Michigan State University.
- Rasor, S. H. (1988). *A study and analysis of general music education, k-8, in the public schools of Ohio, 1987*. PhD diss., University of Cincinnati.
- Shih, T. T. (1997). *Curriculum alignment of general music in Central Texas: An investigation of the relationship between the essential elements, classroom instruction, and student assessment*. PhD diss., The University of Texas at Austin.

C. A. N. Ugwu & E. N. Ahanotu: *Complementing School Music Assessment with...*

Talley, K. E. (2005). *An investigation of the frequency, methods, objectives, and applications of assessment in Michigan elementary general music classrooms*. Master's thesis, Michigan State University.

Tedla, E. (1995). *Sankofa: African thought and education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Zulu, I. M. (2006). Critical indigenous African education and knowledge, *The Journal of Pan-African studies*. 3 (1), pp. 32-49.