

MUSIC AS INCENTIVE FOR REVIVING READING CULTURE AMONG NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS' PUPILS: ROLE OF THE MUSIC EDUCATOR

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Introduction

Reading is a requisite to all academic activities and success all over the world. A child that cannot read may certainly not be able to learn anything significant in school. Many scholars have expressed their worries on poor reading culture among the contemporary schools' children and the problem it may constitute for present and future societal development as some local languages might be endangered and might eventually phase out of the language corridor and this is due to the high level of apathy demonstrated by the present day pupils to reading. This paper lends its voice to the issue of interest and reading among primary school pupils by suggesting music as one of the solutions to improving the reading interest among the Nigerian primary school pupils since one of the problems to poor reading culture is waning interest. The paper argued that music serves as an incentive for sustaining pupils' interest in reading any material prepared for them in primary school. There is little or no study that has examined the beneficial relationship that music activities may have on early grade reading acquisition and development of reading ability in Nigeria. This unique area of research is particularly crucial and relevant to contemporary Nigerian schooling, considering the significance of early reading ability on learners' overall school performance and learning efficacy.

Reading is a major aspect of language acquisition, language mastery and fluency. It is the bedrock to academic success in every other school subject.

Historically, reading culture became part of African life as a result of the introduction of western education especially in Nigeria. The advent of missionaries and evangelical activities of the church could be said to have ushered in formal education which bring about formal reading culture. By nature, Africans were known to be Oralists as oral tradition was a very popular cultural practice among the community people in the pre-colonial era. The tradition was transmitted purely in the oral form from one generation to the other, however, at the arrival of the formal education, the culture of reading and writing gained ascendancy and occupied the centrality of pupil's learning activities. Transmission of idea therefore became embedded in the writing materials which must be read before one gains insight into the mind of the writer.

Although Orality does not in any way suggest lack of education but limitation that surround Orality makes people to prefer reading and writing as means of communication devices, therefore, pupils have to develop interest in reading both in the school and at home before any effective learning takes place in this contemporary world. Ujah-Peter (2014) noted that reading enhances acquisition of skills for handling complex ideas or issues, in reading, one finds encouragement and comfort when unhappy; and many of one's questions are answered on the pages of the book. Through reading, culture is transmitted, language is learnt and vocabulary is developed. Reading helps the readers in self-awareness, empathy, social skills and relationships management. Reading is important because it is a continuous self-education and it encourages curiosity (Ujah-Peter, 2014).

Children's Language Environment and their Reading Development

Environment plays a vital role in the reading culture of a child. A child learns to read at the early stage of life but he reads to learn in the rest of his/her life. It is therefore logical to state that when a child has a poor reading culture in his/her early stage in life, he/she will find it difficult to learn in the future. Therefore, music composed in mother tongue serves as a good teaching material for little children as they grow in life. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Northern Education Initiative Plus Program (NEI-Plus) explains 5Ts and C global best practices as characteristics of instruction that are important for students' academic success especially in reading.

These 5Ts and C include;

- **Time**- this is how often the lesson takes place and how much time it is allocated to reading.
- **Teaching**- this connotes that reading must be taught deliberately by teachers with different strategies to help the pupils understand.
- **Text**- this means that there must be text to read. It talks of availability and the quality of the available text to be read by the pupils.
- **Tongue**- this explains the fact that children learn reading faster and become competent if they start from their Mother Tongue.
- **Testing**- this means how pupils are assessed and what the teacher do with the assessment results and then,
- **C** is the curriculum which is the actual materials used by the teacher to teach the subject like reading to pupils.

Reading is the major means of preserving the intellectual and cultural potential of society, continuity of knowledge and the essential factor of the social-communicative development of man. Today, many native speakers take the continued survival of their language for granted and hardly give any thought to what fate might befall it in the future. Currently, in Nigeria and in Africa in general, hundreds of languages are highly endangered or extinct (Batibo, 2005 cited by Adeniran 2015). For instance, some of the dialects of Yoruba spoken in Benin Republic and Togo are: Ajase, Idasa, Ife Seti, Ije, Isa, Kaboli, Ketu, Manigri, Kura, Moretan, Mokole, Pobe, SabeSabe, Sabe Sauru, Ife Atapame, just as we have Oyo, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ekiti, Yewa, Egba, Ondo, Akoko, and so forth in Nigeria. Speakers of these dialects of the language all recognize themselves as Omo Oduduwa. For any nation such Yoruba, Igbo and so forth to survive beyond the 21st century, ability to speak, read and write the language must be made to attract some economic incentives because once Yoruba native speakers are made to realize that proficiency in Yoruba will bring economic benefits just as proficiency in English does, the motivation to learn and master the language will be high.

Language of immediate environment is a first language and also called natural language, mother tongue, arterial language or L1 is the language (s) a person has learned from birth or within the critical period or that a person speaks best and also is often the basis for social linguistic identity. In some countries, the term language of immediate environment refers to the language of one's ethnic group rather than

one's first language. Children brought up speaking more than one language can have more than one natural language and be bilingual. One of the most widely accepted definitions of a native speaker is a culturally sensitive, professional counseling and listening services where people are heard with respect in their chosen language. Language is among the factor that is hindering the development of education in primary school level.

Although some scholars believe that mother tongue to some extent affect students' performance in English language, but some are of the opinion that it helps the students' academic performance. For instance, Oluwole (2008) submitted that Mother Tongue influences the students' poor performance in English language in Junior School Certificate examination and that there are other factors contributing to students' poor performance in English language. These other factors are poor method of teaching, lack of textbooks, language background and lack of professional growth and development of teachers. On the whole, the performance of students in English language is poor and if the discovered factors are not tackled on time, it will cause a drastic decline in standard of education. Mother Tongue according to Awoniyi (1978) is defined as the language which a group of people considered to inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thoughts and communication. Mother Tongue is the first language that a person learned. In terms of that view, the person is defined as a native speaker of the first language, although one may also be a native speaker of more than one language if all of the languages were learned without formal education, such as through cultural immersion before puberty. Often a child learns the basics of the first language(s) from family. It is therefore generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance.

Bamgbose (1984) noted that the positive results of the experiment in Mother Tongue Medium in Yoruba carried out at the then University of Ife empirically demonstrated the great advantages of mother tongue in primary education for scholastic attainment and even in the successful mastery of English as a second language. Kolawole (2002) also confirmed that the performance of the primary school pupils in English language was very poor stressing that the standard was poor due to a number of other reasons such as: the use of tribal language in the lower classes of the primary school; some pupils do not understand the grammar

because their teachers themselves do not know it; and in most cases English language teachers in the senior primary schools resort to the use of mother tongue to teach and explain the English language even up to the secondary school level. These researchers are of the opinion that there should be a review in the language policy on education. The review according to them should contain recommendations that will make pupils to have exposure to the subject quite early from the primary school irrespective of the advantages of mother tongue. They further suggested that teaching and learning of English should be more practical in our schools, and also the number of years of study and teaching periods should be increased. Finally, materials for learning the subject should be supplied. This will be the time when the problem of failure in the subject will hopefully be overcome. So a firm foundation in English language is very important for better performance.

Akinbote and Ogunsanwo (2003) have a contrary opinion on the use of English language in the early years of the primary school. They opined that the use of mother tongue in the process of teaching and learning in the early years helps, not only to preserve and value one's culture but also to develop it lexically. By and large, Mother Tongue assists children to be versatile in reading and learning other languages and other subjects.

Despite the importance of reading, reading culture is facing a lot of challenges in Nigerian primary schools; its practice is dwindling on daily basis in Nigerian primary schools. Sotiloye and Bodunde (2018) observed that the culture of reading has been going to oblivion as many researchers have lamented the dwindling nature of the reading culture since many students only read for the examination. Whereas, a child needs 1200 hours per year for reading as a requirement for solid academic foundation and future academic success as stipulated by United Educational Society (UNESCO, 2020) but average period for reading on time table of many primary schools in Nigeria is around 500 hours per year. As a result of this, there is need to make up for the time during and after the school hour by increase the interest of the pupils in reading thereby increasing the hours of their reading per year.

Bamigbose (2004) opined that a child learns fast when learned through his own language since such of what he takes in the school is linguistically realized. This is the guiding principle that operates in most educational systems of the world. In fact,

there is a high positive correlation between language and education. It could be any language that could make possible the achievement of the goals of education. The universal basic education is a programmed designed to provide a compulsory basic education to all children who have attained the school age. This paper therefore argues that one major way to increase the interest of the pupils in reading is through the use of music as an incentive in form of background music, prelude or interlude to reading activity.

The Role of Music in Achieving Objectives of Primary Education

Primary education is the education given to a child between the ages of 6 and 11+. Primary education as referred to in the document is education given in an institution for children normally between the ages of 6 to 11 years old. Since the primary school is the foundation on which the rest of the educational system is built upon, the primary level is the key to the success or failure of the whole system. This being the case, the general objectives of primary education as noted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the new National Policy on Education (2003) itemized the following objectives:

- (i) Inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively;
- (ii) lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- (iii) Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society;
- (iv) Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
- (v) Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- (vi) Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in society within the limits of his capacity; and
- (vii) Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and crafts of the locality.

From these objectives, number one state clearly the importance of inculcating permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively. If this is to be done effectively, reading culture of a child must be taken serious and any means that will improve children reading culture must be applied. One of this means is the use of music to create interest in the pupils. Onyiuke, (2005) submitted that the natural response to the nonverbal communicative character of music contributes to the emotional, intellectual, physical and social development of the child.

Development musical skills comes from within, and the people and their musics and ways of making musics need to be listened to, heard and utilised as a basis for arts education (Oehrle & Emeka 2003) which includes music education. Onyiuke, (2005) quoting Broklehurst (1971) and Suzuki (1969) maintained that children learn and develop the ability to learn language from their environment. The ability of learning in any field is not only inherited but is also product of the environment.

Every child can learn music just as he or she can learn how to speak. Greenberg (1979) opines that music contributes in no small way to the development of the child. This can only be achieved through effective music teaching and learning, adopting the use of audio-visual learning aids and practical strategies. The vision of nurturing a Nigerian child who will have full appreciation and enjoyment of music will remain a mirage if there are no adequate materials and application of appropriate methodology. Leonhard and House (1972) argue that music educators have been persuaded that the development of musicianship and aesthetic experience should begin early in children while music provision should receive the highest priority accordingly in the nursery school, kindergarten and primary school. This opinion, of course, derives from modern realities in which the home has become disadvantaged as a primary location for experiencing music practically. However, the Nigerian child shares musical experiences with his/her mother when as a child, strapped behind his/her mother's back, they have actively participated in social gatherings, festivals and ceremonies.

Music as Incentive for Reading among Primary School Pupils

Music has been described as a viable incentive for improving reading culture among the pupils in primary schools. The beneficial relationship that music instruction may have on elementary Foundation Phase learners' acquisition and development of reading ability has been emphasized by Muthivhi & Kriger (2019). This unique area of research is particularly crucial and relevant to contemporary schooling in Africa, considering the significance of early reading ability on learners' overall school performance and learning efficacy. Many scholars have attested to the fact that one of the specific strategies now commonly used to supplement and enhance student learning is the use of background music. For instance, White (2007) conducted a research over a course of three weeks among students in a fourth grade classroom at Logan Elementary School when they were expressing numerous types of negative behaviors, are not motivated to learn, and do not stay

on-task in their academic pursuit. In an effort to change these students, an action research study was conducted that implemented background music in the classroom. Ten fourth grade students were selected to participate in the study. The researcher found out that the overall class met the project's main points and then concluded that implementing background music is an effective tool in primary school.

It is evident from this study that background music sustains pupils' interest in primary school as it affords the teachers an opportunity and obligation to enrich and promote learning further than before thereby "positively affect the productivity, behavior, and motivation of students" (White (2007: 1). This is because "Music is used to create desired moods, foster enjoyment of movement and dance boost energy, increase happiness, bring back powerful memories, and help relaxation and focus" (White (2007: 5). Students relax when music is played as "soft music makes them feel comfortable, focused, and relaxed" (Dinsmore, 2003: 19).

Lewis (2002) submitted that Music can improve the students' grades and performance, but most importantly the students will be gaining new knowledge since when music is played during learning experiences there is more retention of the material. Anderson, Henke, McLaughlin, Ripp, & Tuffs (2000: 6) have earlier noted that the increase of retention could lead to better grades, completion of task and/or assignments, and increased participation in class and that background music also "enhances spelling word retention. Koppelman & Imig (1995) found out that using music to teach reading motivates and increases the reading ability of students as research also demonstrates that "being exposed to music helps develop auditory and visual skills needed for reading, particularly among kindergarten and first grade students.

Lenertz (2002) citing Weinberger (1998) posited that Music has the ability to facilitate language acquisition, reading readiness, and general intellectual development. It can also enhance creativity and promote social development, personality adjustment and self-worth. Teaching reading through music can increase the reading ability of children reading below grade level. Whitaker (1994) confirmed that teaching children to read songs can improve their ability to distinguish letter sounds recognize rhyming words, and musical or word patterns. The

combinations of words in chants, poems, songs and plays can be used as sources of experience with alliteration, meter, rhythm, accent and form.

Muthivhi & Kriger (2019) opined that the question of whether school instruction in specific critical subject disciplines benefits children's learning and conceptual development in related subjects has a long and contentious history in developmental psychology and education. They found out that that participation in school music instruction might benefit primary school learners' development of early reading abilities as participation in music instruction could have beneficial effects on primary school learners' learning and acquisition of early reading skills.

Reviving Reading Culture among Primary School Pupils: Example From "Aworerin"

Music is a major way through which reading culture can be improved among the school children. Example of music that has assisted pupils in reading in some years back was the music that usually accompanied the Yorùbá magazine titled *Aworerin* (literally means look and laugh). *Aworerin* is a comic Yoruba magazine was a publication of the Ministry of Education in Western Nigeria between 1940's and early 80's. It was regarded an 'encyclopaedia' of Yoruba language and culture of the time (aworerin.com, 2018). The magazine was used apart from promote reading culture among the primary school pupils; it was also used to entertain them and make learning of Yorùbá indigenous language and concept interesting during that time. The reading of the magazine was always preceded by an interesting music that stimulated children for the reading activities then. Below is the text of the music:

<i>Gbogbo wa la fe aworerin/2x</i>	all of us want <i>aworerin/2x</i>
<i>Aworerin dun iya jowo ra fun mi</i>	<i>aworerin</i> is interesting mother please by for me
<i>Aworerin baba jowo ra fun mi</i>	<i>aworerin</i> is interesting father please by for me
<i>Gbogbo wa ni/4x</i>	all of us /4x
<i>Gbogbo wa la fe aworerin</i>	all of us want <i>aworerin</i>

When this music is played, children and adults get prepared for reading as it used to create awareness and draw their attention to the reading. This helped the children to create interest in reading as at that time.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that music serves as incentive for sustaining pupils' interest in reading any material prepared for them in primary school. Using music as prelude; interlude and postlude or as background for reading activities will not only create interest in pupils but will also sustain their interest thereby making reading an interesting exercise. The paper therefore suggested that music educator must wake up to their responsibility of composing, arranging and recording music that can gain and sustain the interest of pupils for reading activities. Since pupils' reading ability is directly proportional to many of their academic performance, it is encouraged that music educator play their role to produce music that can really serve as motivation for pupils' reading activities in school and thereby improve their academic performance in other school subjects.

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ⁱ *Aworerin* is a Yoruba indigenous comic magazine that was popular in the 1970s and 1980s.