

TRADITIONAL ENSEMBLE IN CLASSROOM MUSIC LEARNING: A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

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Introduction

The abstractness of music classes in Nigeria schools has been proven to be one of the primary causes of student's refusal to choose music as an elective course in JS (Junior Secondary) class one to three as at 1990-1994. The introduction of musical culture, instruments and terminologies that are foreign to Nigerian student has left the students with mere imagination of non-reality subject of study called music. These unfamiliar terminologies are not only difficult for students to understand but also very difficult for most school teachers to interpret appropriately, since both the teachers and students possess little or no training on the language from which these terminologies were borrowed from. This makes it more difficult for students to remember these terms or even associate the terms with things around them.

Classroom music teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary school has become a big problem for both teachers and student for decades. The primary reason for this is the lack of music learning as a subject in primary school curriculum in Nigeria. This would have served as a foundation for students to build upon as they proceed to secondary school. Another serious problem in music classroom learning is the saturation of secondary school music curriculum with music theories, histories and terminologies that are strange to student's musical culture and society. The musical styles and culture taught in music classroom have no link to the student's experience of music prior school age. Musical examples used in classrooms are not drawn from known musicians and their works; rather they are drawn from 16th, 17th and 18th centuries of Western music experiences. Loise (1989) states that, 'if music be not taught in childhood, much progress must not be expected afterwards'

Consequently, first contact with music in classroom at junior secondary school becomes so abstract, unimaginable and not real to many students, especially, to

the majority of students whose parents are neither priests nor officials in Anglican and Catholic churches; where worshippers/members are directly or indirectly exposed to some level of classical music. Children who grew up in Catholic and Anglican churches are believed to have acquired minimal familiarity with Western musical style, yet they are the minority of the Nigerian children facing the situation of music in classroom learning. Music terms sound funny and tiring to majority of students with the regular use of Semi-quaver, Demi-semi-quaver, Hemi-demi-semi-quaver, and coupled with its calculation of tones, semi-tones, tone- tone semitone. These are wearied to student and are easy sleeping tablet in classroom because the students cannot even fathom the relevance of these to their personal live and true life music situation in their society. Therefore, majority of student's chose Fine and applied art which makes more meaning to them, leaving music classroom empty for some teacher. At the observation of the above, Odunuga and Edra (2013) opined thus,

Music teaching and learning have suffered an unfortunate situation in the Nigerian secondary schools and colleges for decades. A closer look at the present situation in Nigerian schools reveals that students and teachers enter the classroom with a rich experience of Nigerian music and their local communities, but in schools music operates within the institutional context that negates the outside experience. (308)

Presently, the issue of having very few students offering music in Nigerian secondary schools has contributed immensely to the fusion of music and fine art into a subject Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA). Even in creative art curriculum, music as a subject was not covered; rather fine arts dominated the subject which serves as a means to retain student's interest. Therefore, this work examined the issues in classroom music learning situation in Nigeria and their resolution drawing from personal experience, participant observation and literature review. However, the experience in Community Secondary School Isienu-Nsukka in the 1990s proved that with the aid of traditional music ensemble, (this including dance and instrumentals) student's interest in musical classroom learning could be salvaged.

The Problem

Dating from colonial and post-colonial schools in Nigeria, music curriculum has been stuffed with Western musical style, theories, histories and terminologies which are unrelated to the student's background of musical culture and traditions. The history of Western musicians who lived four to five centuries ago and their music styles still form the basis for 21st century Nigerian curriculum. Although some effort has been made to incorporate African music in music curriculum, but it has not been properly designed to facilitate learning of music in classroom. The only visible effort was an introduction of African music as topics which still did not solve any problem, rather it further isolate African music from the Western music which forms the foundation of today's classroom music learning.

Music Education in Traditional African Society: Pre-Colonization

Music is a medium of artistic expression through which the intellectual and socio-cultural development of a child is achieved. Musical activities play vital role in the life of every child. As a result, Africans expose their children very early to the experience of their music. In Nigeria, children's involvements in musical traditions and activities of their communities are nurtured conscientiously from cradle. Children come in contact with music from the very first day they are born. Birth chants and celebrations of the baby with music expose the child to a very early experience of their traditional music. While mothers are singing in celebration of the baby's arrival, the baby is simultaneously registering the musical sounds, different pitches, timbre and melodic style of their music. Mothers sing for their children to encourage them as they develop new skills in life, such as crawling or walking. Mothers also use music to lull their children to sleep. Thus, the child's musical training starts from home. As a child participates in work songs, game song, children's play, folktales, moonlight play and dance, he/she begins to acquire basic skills needed in their musical practices. Okafor (2005) argued as follows,

The music learnt at childhood is important as a foundation for learning other things to come:- art, craft, science, human relations and social practices. It was a system that worked and worked well. He further stated that no lesson learnt, even when it served as mere entertainment, was useless ever after. All these were meant to equip the child to become a man later. (224- 225)

At adult stage, the child would have been culturally matured in the musical tradition and practices of his/her people. They display high level of mastery in their musical activities, knowing the established conventions in their traditional musical values; that includes standards and taboos, the scope and restrictions, their beliefs, myths and the norms. Musical activities and participations root children in the traditions and cultures of their indigenous society. It broadens their cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social life. It also helps them develop musical skills without much mental stress.

However, traditional education in Nigerian societies makes extensive use of music and other expressive arts. The folk music of Nigerian society embedded in itself the story history, past experiences and the present situation of the people (Sunday-Kanu 2015). Through songs texts, moral codes and ethics of the land are inculcated in citizens, Language, the things his people live by and how the society works are also taught.

The music education in Nigerian's traditional society is not unrestricted as often perceived. There are principles and law guiding different community music according to their traditions. Cultural values streamline the values and restrictions on the musical traditions of each community. The participation in teaching and learning of music making are generally expected to flow from the older to the young generations of the community. Although music education in traditional Nigeria society were undocumented before contact with Western education but, learning were based on oral tradition.

Apart from the oral traditions that are generally learnt during participation in communal music performances, apprenticeship is another formally structured music learning process that existed in Nigerian indigenous society. Apprenticeship takes much longer time and procedure in learning and attaining the musical maturity required. Apprenticeship produces musical experts who are highly skilled and are devoted to their musicianship. Most of them who trained this way become the lead musicians in the court, palace, shrine, etc. (Adedeji, 2013) submitted that Africans have their own structures and methods for music learning by stating that:

African classrooms include moonlight plays, age grade meetings, initiation venues, religious festival social functions etc. Methods

include parenting, apprenticeship, lifelong development, imitation techniques, metaphysical dimensions, self-education, teacher learning-all-learning and demonstration or activities. (48).

Apprenticeship method of music learning entails children being attached to a master musician (instrumentalist or vocalist) for the purpose of training. The student (the child) usually lives in the household of the master from a very young age to maturity. The student start from observing the master's live style, his relationship with his family, his instrument, his profession and the management of performances. The student graduates from one level to the other may be from holding or taking care of instrument to playing them, and/or from organizing the master's performances to performing with his master. Nketia (1975), also concurred that 'in African societies, participation in music may be a voluntary activity or an obligation imposed by one's membership in a social group, where an African society is stratified. Example, the societies of the Hausa of Nigeria and the Wolof of Senegambia, musical activities may be related to classroom structure.' This is also applicable to traditional music education in Igbo community.

Western Music Classroom Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

The experience of colonization and missionaries exposed Nigerians and other African countries to Western music education which adopted the classroom music learning. This was achieved by the introduction of Western musical styles in the church, schools and establishment of military bands. Nketia (1975: 14-15) stated that all these development were encouraged and strengthened by the activities of church, which preached against African musical practices while promoting Western music cultural values. He opined that missionaries adopted a hostile attitude to African music, especially drumming which they associated with pagan practices. As a result of hostility towards African musical practices, the missionaries made every effort to establish Western music style. They started with transmission of hymnal tones to African text and accompaniment with the piano which became the primary instrument in churches. Music curriculum was designed projecting Western music style and practices. Olorunsogo and Olorunsogo 2014 confirmed that,

The early missionaries were the first music teachers in Nigeria. They taught their converts around mission houses hymns, chants,

psalms, canticles, masses, brass and other types of Western classical music. Those whose aptitude for music was above average were exposed to the harmonium, and organ. Once the converts have attained some level of mastery, they are made pupils teachers- to teach others. The first Teacher Training College (TTC) in Nigeria was established in 1959 at Abeokuta, by Church Missionary Society (CMS) (176).

On the other hand, several Nigerians were recruited into the police and army band, and they were trained to play for colonial officials. These set of people were trained by British band conductor.

Several decades have gone since after colonization and missionary movements, but Nigerian school curriculums are still struggling to be free from their legacies and influence. Western music education curriculum design is one of the colonial impacts on Nigerian classroom music which have affected both music teachers and students negatively. No wonder Okafor (2005) lamented that 'modern society has made music abstract art or discipline- a specialized subject studied apart from life and the activities of the immediate environment.' This has gone a long way to hinder the success of music classroom teaching and learning, especially, in its relation to community music. Although Nigerian music can now be properly notated and documented but, the struggle to make classroom music relevant to society continues. Yekini-Ajenifuja (2013:70) concluded that traditional music education was systematically designed with a purpose to model the African philosophy and to suit its human cultural environment. The Western music educational style, as good and effective as they are for the Western countries, they are not suitable in the development of music educational structure for Nigerians and Africans as a whole.

Pedagogical Approach to Classroom Music Learning using Traditional Ensemble

Entry behaviour is one of the primary teaching techniques that have been proven by educationists to help improve teaching and learning in classroom situation. This implies systematic progression from known to unknown. Therefore, teachers are expected to start each class from the familiar experiences or

knowledge of students to motivate and prepare their interests, before systematically progressing to the unfamiliar knowledge. Most of the teacher's examples are also expected to be drawn from the familiar knowledge and experiences before proceeding to the unfamiliar one. This systematic approach makes learning progressive and meaningful to the learner. Adoption of musical style and practices that are familiar to student such as traditional music ensemble (instrumental or vocal) which will involve every member of the class as likened to the community musical experiences will not only serve as an entry behavior for the class but will serve as interest motivator and creates a lasting impression of the classroom music experience.

Exposition of student to musical experience that are unfamiliar and unrelated to their musical experience at first contact with music in school makes the whole scenario of classroom music learning more difficult than it ought to be. The success of classroom musical experience largely depends on the musical culture in which the student was nurtured prior school age. Nzewi's philosophy 2001 regarding modern music education as cited in (Modeme and Sunday-Kanu 2013) stated that the formal system of education should be based on indigenous African model and resources in generating the content and the pedagogy. When the theoretical and material contents are based on African music models, the method reflects the pragmatic approach, which helps the young people to understand their immediate environment with a great view of socio-cultural base. This will in no doubt help the young ones to have value for their culture rather than getting attached to the Western culture, which in turn will enslave them. In the same line of thinking, Ojukwu (2013) argued thus,

All musical programs of the schools should be designed towards the promotion of Nigerian musical heritage. It is no value to Nigerian student if he/she is made to study western literature, instrumentation and orchestration in school music, while he/she cannot apply the knowledge acquired in them in learning about Nigerian music, indigenous musical instrument with definite pitches and indefinite pitches. These are what students can obtain from their locality and which, for practical purposes, will be useful to the society. (334)

It is obvious that every child has some level of capacity for creativity what is left is for teachers to apply classroom ethics to activate student dormant creative trait and propel them to state of actualization. Ensemble or communal music performance is a readily creative activator laid in Nigerian community. It has been experimented and it worked very effectively. As at 1990-1994, all newly admitted students into junior secondary school at Community Secondary School Isienu were faced with the decision of choosing some elective subjects of which music and fine arts were placed side by side for student to choose one. About seventy (70) to eighty (80) students were admitted in the school per year. In the case of seventy-five (75) students on admission there were usually shared as thus, twenty-five (25) students per a class making up three classes as thus, junior secondary (JS)1a, JS.1b and JS.1c. In this study student were used as sample material in relation to music classroom learning. It is also important to point out that the school was girls secondary school, thus, the issue of gender in the choice of subject and performance may not arise.

In year one, about fifty (50) students chose music hoping it would be music as they know it from their community. About five (5) students chose music because they have the experience of playing around church organ or having little experience of singing in parts or solfa notation as a result of growing up around or within church premises (in most cases members of Anglican and Catholic church). The remaining fifteen (15) students chose fine arts. After JS.1 it was observed that student ratio for the two subject experiences sudden reshuffle. At the inception of JS.11 class (first term year two) about sixty (60) students opted for fine arts while ten (10) students continued with music, these ten (10) includes the five (5) with prior knowledge of music before entering junior secondary school. This was observed for three consecutive years, until a new music teacher was employed to join the only music teacher in the school. The new teacher immediately introduced an ensemble for dance and instruments. This ensemble started with few Igbo musical instruments namely; *Ichaka* (shakers) *Igba* (drums) *Ogene* (gong) *Ekwe* (wooden gong). They perform at the start and end of music periods. The instrumentation was the first to attract the students coming back from fine arts classroom. Soon after, some students started moving from fine arts back to music. Before the end of the session, music class already had full instrumental group and dance group functioning, not only for classroom but also for school occasions. The

teacher made extensive use of the ensembles, not only as a motivating factor to get student's interest but also as an illustration material during her teaching. She systematically applied some of these practices into everyday classroom music learning while minting the music curriculum as well. She was having more of ensemble and little of Western music style to enable student remember and enjoy each class, while drawing her examples from student's familiar experiences. Laying emphasis on African musical practices, she was able to place side by side the African musical practices and that of Western styles in the curriculum for better appreciation by the students. This method applied by the teacher expresses the opinions and views of some scholars as seen in (Olorunsogo and Olorunsogo 2014:182) when they asserted that music educators should go beyond presenting mere theories of African musical arts rather, effort should be made to study African music practically so as to encourage its use in schools and colleges.

In the same line of thinking, Omobiyi (1983) asserts that "it is essential that children be led into the understanding of their musical tradition before they reach the age of 12 in order to develop the right attitude towards it and also provide a basis for the study of other music of the world" Nzewi 2003 concluded that pupil should begin the study of music education from their own cultural point of entry, and once they understand the intricacy of music in their own culture, they would therefore be able to listen to music of other world cultures with understanding and appreciation.

Learning with the Aid of Ensemble and other Practical Experiences

Instrumental learning in classroom music programmes have advantage over the writing of mere theories, because instrumental and other ensembles engage the students' skills and help help to arouse their interest in classroom learning. Children have proven to learn better when transferring musical knowledge via musical activities. Nnamani (2009:29) confirmed that the ideal instrumental music programmes arouse pupils' interest at the earliest possible age and provide lessons and group performing opportunity to meet their advancing interests and needs. According to Pestalozzian (1986), principle of education rejected the school practice of memorization and recitation that are common today in our secondary school music classroom learning. In Nigerian situation for instance, students are always memorizing Italian and Greek words used for musical

expression in classroom without having clear understanding of their applications in practical. Pestalozzian substituted memorization and citation with observation, experimentation and reasoning to enhance learning in classroom. He was the first to link the educational process to the natural development of a child. In the same vein, Loise (1986) argued that the only way to develop the abilities of the child was to create situations in which those abilities would have to be used. They opined that to achieve this, the teacher's job will be to stimulate and guide the child to self-activity. Omobiyi-obidike (2004) also believed that a coherent music teacher should possess such a stimulating ability to inspire students through application of appropriate methods, of teaching music. Until music teachers in Nigeria device a systematic approach to make use of traditional musical instrument (especially voice or Instrumental ensemble) as part of their classes or as an a method for arousing and sustaining student's interests in the class, music classroom learning in Nigeria will remain a tussle of struggle for both teachers and students.

Mason (1986) propounded a method which may be beneficial to Nigerian music teachers. He argued that the practical based learning is laid on the principle of inductive method, exercising actively the reasoning powers of the mind with its pedagogy symbols, such as;

- a. Sound before symbol
- b. Principle before rules
- c. Practice before theory

He asserted that knowledge is to be acquired by the pupils themselves, rather than from the dictation of the teacher. Mason believed that learning occurs in three ways.

1. Through self-activity

Learning by doing; pupils acquire knowledge through their own observations, experiences and actions, rather than being told by teachers

2. Through reasoning

Observation, Comparison, Judgment and decision to arrive at conclusions based on their experiences.

3. Through testimony and faith

Certain Universal Usages, certain definitions simply exist. Students cannot arrive at these through reasoning of self-activity (Loise,1986 P. 6-8)

Recommendations

In consideration of the subject of the discussion, the following recommendations are suggested;

1. Effort should gear towards the use of African style and musical experiences as approaches or pedagogical strategies for impacting music knowledge.
2. Need to reform music curriculum to reflect more of Nigerian musical culture and history, for relevance to student and their immediate communities.
3. Nigerian secondary and tertiary institutions should ensure that:
 - There is availability of traditional musical instruments for learning.
 - Music teachers have basic training on these instruments.
 - They employ talented performer within their various communities to assist during class performance activities.
 - They organize concerts regularly to exhibit students' skills.

Conclusion

The appreciation and enhancement of music teaching and learning in Nigerian secondary schools can only be achieved when classroom music education is rooted in Nigerian cultural concept for its enrichment and benefits, not only to students but also for the immediate community/environment. The experience at the Community Secondary School Isienu Nsukka between 1990-1994 proved it. Without drawing from the cultural concept of the student by way of using familiar musical instruments, musical forms, styles and history before moving to other world's musical style will only leave Nigerian music students stumbling in wild vacuum of music classroom learning which only ends up in frustration.

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