

VOICE AS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT AND ITS ROLE IN THE ENHANCEMENT MUSIC EDUCATION IN ENYINDA INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE, PORT HARCOURT

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Introduction

The human “voice” remains the oldest musical instrument in the world because of its nature as a natural musical instrument. Singing, which is also the oldest musical activity of man, cannot be achieved without the “voice”. This is an activity in which man is involved in, from birth till death. The human voice is naturally in-built. There is no man under this planet that is without a voice; it is the birth right of every man created by God. The voice is the first instrument with which everyone can express his or herself musically. Albert (2005) opines that:

the voice is one of the many wonderful features of the human body. However, the voice does not operate in isolation from other features. It needs the help of other organs to make for effective performance. The knowledge of these organs will not only aid in appreciating them but also help us understand the role they play in the production of the right tone in singing. They include; the trunk of the body, the diaphragm, the chest, the lungs, the trachea, the larynx and the pharynx, the nasal cavity and the mouth. (p. 14-18)

The pedagogical values of “voice” in teaching-learning of music in schools cannot be imagined as it cuts across all aspects of music education including theory, history of western music, African music, church music, etc. The human “voice” remains the most accessible musical instrument; it is the foundation of musical development in class and outside class.

Enyinda International College

Enyinda International College is a private owned secondary school in Ogbogoro community of Obio/Akpor Local Government Area in Rivers State. The school consists of the {UBE} Universal Basic Education session and Senior Secondary session. In the UBE session, Music is included in their curriculum while in the Senior session, Music is not included.. Voice is the commonest musical instrument that could be accessible in the teaching of Music in Enyinda International College. Kodally (2007) puts it that it is only the human voice that is accessible and free of charge, yet the most beautiful of all instruments and the fertile soil of all Musical culture, extending to all human. This is quite true of the human voice; it is the cheapest and most accessible musical instrument. In Enyinda International College, the human voice plays an important role in music education as it is the only musical instrument that is available in the school in terms of accessibility; the other instrument is keyboard which is not always accessible because of lack of power (electricity).

The only musical activity which has been proven effective is “singing”. The school begins everyday with the singing of hymns and choruses during their morning devotion and at the close of school every day; the school also spends about ten to fifteen minutes in singing (which they refer to as praise and worship). The school also has a choral group which usually goes out every year with other schools for choral competitions. Their end of terms and sessions are usually celebrated with choral songs including traditional and western songs.

Singing is indeed the foundation of music education in Enyinda International College. Kodaly’s approach to music education which is based on teaching, learning and understanding of music through the experience of singing, giving direct access to the world of music without the technical problems involved with the use of musical instruments, is the basis of music education in Enyinda International College. Music education in general could be developed and achieved with the use of the naturally in-built musical instrument which is the human “voice”.

Singing is the fastest way to learn and internalize music education in Enyinda International College as well as any other school in Africa. Through singing, the

students of Enyinda International College acquired skills that are essential for all musical memories through interaction and harmonic hearing, etc. In all, these could only be achieved with the singing voice which makes it very easy for the students to be fully involved in musical activities and as well music education.

Significance of Voice in Enyinda International School

It is undoubtedly that one of the reasons why there is lack of music education in the curriculum of Nigerian primary and secondary schools is because of fear of the financial involvement in having music education. The major area that involves finance is the purchase of adequate musical instruments, materials and music laboratory for rehearsals. That notwithstanding, Enyinda International College still see music as a subject or course that could be achieved with the help of the “voice”, which is a dynamic musical instrument.

In Enyinda International College, the research showed that in the area of music education, the school is fully involved in “singing” which is one of the most important aspects of music education and could be achieved significantly with the use of the “voice”. Kodaly in Eosze (1982) opines that “a deeper musical education can at all times develop only where singing forms its basis”. This is true because singing is supposed to be natural and the birth rights of every child in order to express his/her self musically. Kodaly states that “singing gives direct access to music without the technical difficulties of an instrument.

The voice therefore plays an important role on the music education of Enyinda International College as such the voice was utilized in their choral studies which are the most valuable aspect of music in the school. More so, the voice was also used in the teaching of rudiments of music especially in notes and values, scale, rhythm, melody, I – IV – V harmony etc. Therefore, it was the only valuable musical instrument that was accessible for the college to use in developing music education in the college.

Impact of the Voice on Humans

The voice is one of the musical instruments and is really the foundation of all musical instruments. It functions very well if properly taken care of and that is by observing the rules guiding the use of the voice appropriately. Albert, (2005)

opines that, "the voice is a viable natural asset bestowed on us by God. As an instrument, the voice requires a level of training and a good musical foundation". Invariably, the voice needs to be handled with some level of care just like any other musical instrument and constant practicing is required else the desired sound production by the voice will not be achieved. The impact of the voice deals explicitly with the noticeable effect of the voice used as a musical instrument not just as a talking voice by the Enyindah school students and could be itemized as follows:

- It goes a long way helping the students to unleash their bottled up emotions through singing. When these students are happy, the excitement is expressed in their singing and any correction made on the songs at that particular time, will be accepted and effected very fast because of their mood. On the contrary, if the students are sad, their interpretation of the music will be badly affected and this will definitely slow down the learning process of the music.
- When the students present songs with good voices or with bad voices, the facial expression of the audience shows the acceptance or displeasure of the performance.
- A good voice earns one fame and honour. In course of a performance a singer gives in his best, he earns a standing ovation and exchange of pleasantries that leads to signing autographs, elevating the status of the performer to a high esteem and some of the wealthy ones that are music enthusiast present there, will definitely want to identify with the performer because of his sonorous voice. Students in the above mentioned school had been involved in various singing competitions and had won several prizes and awards owing to their brilliant performances in terms of singing.
- A real performer because of the delicateness of his voice will not be seen talking any how or shouting at the top of his voice to avoid destroying his voice. This in essence automatically helps in character moulding of the individual. The students of Enyinda School had been taught these principles and it has really been of immense help to moulding their character because they are not seen to be talking too much in order not to destroy their voices.
- Another effect is found in aging with male singers because no vocal range could actually be recommended for male singers within the ages of transforming from adolescent to adulthood. The fact that these students in the said school had been undergoing various voice training, helps them to be able

to sing comfortably to an extent on different vocal ranges and be able to revolve around various keys of music such that the period of transformation from adolescent to adulthood, does not pose much problems to them on settling on a particular voice range.

- Imposing parts on singers affects the human voice. If a student that has a soprano voice is compelled to always sing bass part, it affects the person negatively because his/her voice changes from its original range to falsetto thereby destroying and changing the timbre of the voice.

Intellectual Benefits of the Voice

The intellectual benefits of the voice cannot be over-emphasized. The teaching of voice could also be used to achieve the intellectual and social changes in man. According to Richard (2004), “teaching offers a bright and rewarding career for those who can meet the intellectual and social challenges of jobs” (p.5). This is an example of what the voice can offer when it is properly appreciated. In as much as one is involved in singing, it is not just for entertaining the audience or for the fun of it, but there are intellectual benefits which a singer stands to gain. Information gotten from an internet source and the observations on students of Enyindah School suggests as follows;

- Singing increases the amount of oxygen taken into the body thereby produces a feeling of alertness as more oxygen gets to the brain.
- Learning to sing songs from beginning to the end improves the reading skill and the motto skills of the students by developing the coordination between their brain and their body.
- Singing helps to calm negative ‘chatter’ the distracting of unhelpful thoughts which the students can have at all times-because they are focused on the job of singing, and this stops them from getting distracted by any other issue.
- Singing improves the student’s ability to listen. The process of learning to sing help the students to be more concentrated especially when listening to others singing with them or to an instructor producing the right sound.
- Singing helps in the structural capabilities of the students which is very helpful for some of them who might normally avoid or dislike a lot of discipline and method.
- It opens up the intricate and complex aural word. The students through singing of various voice pieces begin to hear things they never knew existed.

Findings

During the course of this research, we realized that voice as a natural musical instrument is not well appreciated by many. There is a saying that a prophet is not honoured in his own land. This is the case of the “voice”; probably because it is the most affordable and accessible musical instrument. This fact is not known to most schools as they do not include music education in their curriculum, blaming it on lack of funds for purchase of musical instruments.

In the course of the research, we had a field trip to the school and the students were asked the following research questions:

1. Which is the most affordable and accessible musical instrument”?
2. Do we all have voices to sing”?

Their answers to the questions are as follows respectively.

1. Some students mentioned keyboard, some guitar, and some, other instruments. Just one student was able to mention “voice”.
2. Most of the students shouted “yes ma” and started singing to the amazement of the researchers and the teachers around.

At this point, the researchers explained to the students that the voice is actually a musical instrument that is capable of doing as much as any other musical instruments can. The researchers went further to explain to the students that what distinguishes the voice from other instruments is the fact that, it is capable of producing musical sounds, and its lyrics. It was discovered that most schools in Port Harcourt complain of lack for fund as their reasons for not having music education in their school curriculum.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Many studies have shown that music education is capable of developing all aspects of the students or a child’s learning domain including cognitive, psychomotor and affective domain. Nigerian traditional songs could be used to achieve some cognitive, psychomotive and affective lessons in the classroom. Students should be given the opportunity to develop their innate musicality fully through singing. They should start from the known to the unknown, simple to complex. They should first begin with singing of their traditional songs in the classroom thereby giving them the opportunity to appreciate music. Thereafter,

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they can develop to more serious areas in music having aroused the interest of the students.

The singing voice perhaps is a natural musical instrument which every individual own. Therefore, it is the birth right of every child to express his or her self musically through the singing voice. It is not enough to say "because of lack of fund to buy musical instruments that a school cannot be involved in music education and thereby deprive the child from expressing his in-built musical skills. Music education could be developed with or without sophisticated musical instruments. Schools should use what they have to get what they need.

If the choral groups are well developed by involving the students in some vocalization that will enable them train their voices and improve their singing patterns, they could go out and make some money through their choral competitions and even concerts in their schools that could fetch them some money. With this, they can begin to gradually buy other musical instruments that could help in their music education.

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