

TOWARDS DISPELLING THE PHOBIA IN NIGERIAN WOMEN FOR KEYBOARD PLAYING: THE LEARNING THEORISTS' APPROACH

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Introduction

Keyboard playing is a very significant and interesting aspect of music pedagogy. In Nigeria, only men feature as organists or pianists in churches, schools and companies, etc. Regrettably, there is no known case to the researchers, of any Nigerian female organist or pianist featuring in these capacities except the female researcher who is an Anglican Church organist and a school pianist. (See appendix) This is a challenge to all Nigerian female musicologists and those of them under training. The adage, “what a man can do, a woman can do much better” should be actualized in Nigerian female musicologists in the area of keyboard playing.

In the words of Ajewole (2013) “in African culture generally and in Nigeria in particular, the place of women is in the kitchen.” (p.62) Emanevbe (2003) adds that:

A woman should be seen and not heard. It is seen as something abnormal and against the culture for a woman to see herself in a position of authority which is the exclusive reserve for male. Women cannot participate in politics as this will be seen as an attempt to rub shoulder with men. A woman is seen as the property of the husband (P.4).

Could this cultural heritage be responsible for this? Or is keyboard playing an uphill task to venture into by a female? Or is it the issue of referring to the female

gender as 'weaker vessels'? Or is it because of the fact that they are homemakers and are overwhelmed by house chores? Could it be stage fright, discrimination among their male counterparts or even time factor?

This study is aimed at disabusing the minds of Nigerian women from this phobia for keyboard playing by creating an enabling mindset that will encourage the womenfolk to play the keyboard impressively as church organists or school pianists. In this study, the researchers proffered solutions to this problem through delving into some psychological theories of learning that will aid every willing Nigerian woman to play the keyboard effectively, the gender notwithstanding. It is envisaged that the learning theories applied in this work will put women on a high pedestal by promoting the urge in them to develop their skills in piano and organ playing, to benefit the Churches, students in particular and the Nigerian populace in general. The methods employed in this study include library method, survey and observation.

Nigerian Women in the Present Dispensation

Today, the story has changed. In Nigeria, women are generally excelling in various areas of life's endeavours. These include their careers, businesses, and trades. Many Nigerian women drive their private cars. In 2014, a woman mechanic was interviewed in the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel. She even displayed some of her tools during the interview session.

In big cities in Nigeria, such as Port Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja, etc., there are women taxi drivers who rub shoulders with their male counterparts in the business. In the academic scene, many women have excelled as professional engineers, medical doctors, accountants, lawyers and teachers. There are uncountable female professors in Nigeria. The current Vice-chancellor of the University of Uyo Nigeria, Professor Comfort Ekpo at the time of documentation of this paper is a woman. A woman, Professor Grace-Alele Williams was a onetime Vice Chancellor of the University of Benin, Nigeria. She served in that capacity from 1985 to 1991. There was once a female governor in Anambra state, Dame Virgy Etiaba and numerous present and past female deputy governors, commissioners, ministers, in Ministries and other parastatals.

Six Current Nigerian Female Ministers (At the Time of Documentation of this Paper)

1. Amina Mohammed, the Minister for Environment
2. Hajia Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed, the Minister of State Budget and National Planning
3. Aisha Jummai Al-Hassan, the Minister of Women Affairs
4. Aisha Abubakar, the Minister of State, Trade, Industry & Investment
5. Kemi Adeosun, the Minister of Finance
6. Khadija Abba Ibrahim, Minister of State Foreign Affairs

Four Current Nigerian Female Deputy Governors (At the Time of this Paper's Documentation)

1. Dr. Oluranti Adebule (Lagos State)
2. Mrs. Yetunde Onanuga (Ogun State)
3. Dr. (Mrs.) Ipalibo Banigo (Rivers State)
4. Hon. Cecilia Ezeilo (Enugu State)

There are of course many Nigerian female Pastors, and even Bishops. Examples include; Engineer Pastor Mrs. Nkechi Ene of the Carpenter's Church, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Bishop Mrs Nkechi Iloputaife of Victory Church, Lagos, Nigeria and Bishop Mrs. Benson Idahosa of the Church of God Mission Worldwide.

Ayewole (2013), remarks that "women have contributed scientifically to the sociopolitical and economic development of the country in their various fields" (P.63). Fadeyi and Olaregan (2001) reveal that:

Educated eminent Nigerian women have made their marks in the history of the nation. Prominent among them were Madam Tinubu of Egba land, Efunsetan Amina of Ibadan, Amina of Zaria, Mrs. Fumulayo Ransomekuti, Professor Mrs. Bolanle Kufanyi Olubo to mention a few . (P. 65).

Adepoju (2003) asserts that, "politically there are women who have made impact and are still making impacts. Many women have been appointed ministers, deputy governors, Senators, Commissioners and so on." (P.3). Also Ajewole (2013) explains that, "also in the professional field, for example medicine, engineering, banking, law, etc., we have had women who have competed

favourably with men.”(P. 63). The onus lies with the Nigerian women to also strive to excel as church organists and pianists, in churches, schools and in other public performances since they measure up very well and excel in other trades, fields and disciplines and even in politics.

Keyboard Instruments

Kennedy and Kennedy (2004) define the keyboard as, “a frame, or set keys presented in a continuous arrangement.” (P.401). According to them, “the purpose of keyboards is to enable the two hands (e.g. on piano forte) or the two hands and two feet (e.g. organ) readily to control the sounds from a much larger number of strings, reeds or pipes that could otherwise be controlled”.(P.401). For this study, the emphasis is on the two commonly used keyboard instruments; the piano and the organ.

Methodology

The researchers interviewed 10 female musicologists (Lecturers) and 30 female students selected randomly from the University of Port Harcourt, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri to ascertain from them the causes of this phobia in women for piano or organ playing. The result of the interview is computed below:

Women fear to play the Keyboard for these reasons:

S/N		Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	Lack of Interest	0	0%	40	100%
2	It is a very difficult task	40	100%	0	0%
3	Women are created as “weaker vessels”	35	86%	5	14%
4	House Chores	40	100%	0	0%
5	Time factor	40	100%	0	0%
6	Discrimination by men	30	75%	10	25%
7	Stage fright	35	86%	5	14%
8	Lack of commitment	30	75%	10	25%

Findings: According to the result of the interview, women are interested in keyboard playing but there are factors that militate against their effort to play the instrument, and these include:

- a. It is tasking and very difficult.
- b. Women are incapacitated by their gender as “weaker vessels.
- c. They are home makers and are overwhelmed by house chores.
- d. Time factor is another challenge.
- e. Discrimination by their male counterparts in keyboard playing is a problem.
- f. Stage fight to perform publicly is another challenge.
- g. Most women are not committed at all in piano or organ playing.

The Psychological Theories of learning

Learning according to Burns (1995) “is a relatively permanent change in behaviour which includes both observable activity and internal processes”. (P.12). Keyboard playing is an observable behaviour which takes its root from internal activities such as the rudiments of music before the actual playing of the musical instrument.

Ivan Pavlov’s Classical Conditioning Theory of Learning

Ivan Pavlov (1846 – 1936), a renowned Russian psychologist formulated the classical conditioning theory of learning. This theory teaches that change in behaviour occurs in an organism when paired with a stimulus in the environment. In this theory, learning is dependent upon what precedes the expected behaviour. Pavlov conducted an experiment using a dog. The dog was made to learn to associate the bell with food because both were paired in the experiment. This led to salivation of the dog. The dog was conditioned to salivate even when only the bell rang. Food (unconditioned stimulus – US) produces salivation (unconditioned response – UR). The dog learnt to salivate subsequently when the bell (CS) rang alone and this produces salivation (UR). In our context, when the keyboard is paired with good organ or piano music, every normal person (women in this case) will definitely ‘salivate’ because of the association of the two things. Before venturing into teaching the keyboard especially to the female folk, associate the keyboard with interesting effects ranging from playing beautiful keyboard music, playing CDs, of good organ/piano music. Motivating them can be in form of displaying films or CDs where women feature distinctly on the keyboard. It could

be in form of counseling and letting them know that when the right skills are applied, that they will triumph in keyboard playing. Pictures of European women playing the keyboard could be displayed in the music resource centre to boost their morale. Motivation is a cardinal point if learning must take place.

Classroom Implication of Pavlov's Theory (in keyboard playing)

1. Pavlov's theory believes that one must practice severally and master one task effectively before delving into another one. In keyboard (piano) playing, the learner must be made to practice some fingering exercise that will make the fingers flexible. Such exercises include scales, arpeggios, etudes (studies), e.g. Scherny's etudes before delving into piano pieces. The study must be a step by step affair from simple to complex, from known to unknown before playing piano music which is a higher task.
2. Keyboard teachers must learn how to motivate learners to learn. They should ensure that the learners participate effectively by trying their hands at all stages of learning the keyboard. The chalk – talk method is not advisable. Students' activities and participation are vital in keyboard learning.

Edward Thorndike's Connectionism Theory (Trial and Error Theory)

Thorndike, an American psychologist propounded the learning theory of connectionism or trial and error. According to him, learning is the association between stimulus and response. The association can be strengthened or weakened by the nature and frequency of pairing of stimulus and response. This shows that an organism will naturally repeat an action from which it obtains a pleasant stimulus.

In his theory, Thorndike put a cat in a puzzle box with visible but inaccessible food outside. The food will only be assessable to the cat if he escaped from the box. After series of effort to get out of the box, it accidentally operated an inbuilt mechanism created by Thorndike for opening the box; it escaped and obtained the food. The random movement was reduced in subsequent attempts to reach the food showing that it has learnt that operating the mechanism leads to its escape from the box to get the food.

Thorndike's laws

According to Alao & Ademiyi (2009), Thorndike's laws are:

1. **Law of Readiness:** Once a person is motivated to embark on a task, doing it brings satisfaction to the actor or learner.
2. **Law of Exercise:** Thorndike promotes repetition because it leads to learned association. Constant practice is needful if an action must be mastered and not forgotten. Lack of practice leads to forgetfulness.
3. **Law of Effect:** Thorndike is of the view that any action that produces satisfying effect will certainly be repeated.

Classroom Implications of Thorndike's Theory in Keyboard Teaching/ Learning

1. Readiness is significant in learning. The keyboard teacher should consider the level of the learners so as not to give them more than they can chew e.g. age/class.
2. The teacher must motivate the keyboard learners to sustain their interest. This can be achieved by commending any positive effort or improvement of the learner with positive remarks such as 'well done', 'very good', 'great', 'keep it up' etc'.
3. The teacher must present the piano lessons in logical and coherent manner to arrest the learners' interest. Move from simple to complex, from known to unknown, from concrete to abstract etc.
4. The teacher should ensure that the learners practice during and after each lesson period on their own. There is no magic in piano playing. Learners must practice because according to Hull (1943) "Learning may not occur unless practice is enforced". Agu in Agu (2015) adds that, "the delivery approach is activity oriented, makes the lesson simple, interesting, inviting, fascinating, activity laden, and instructive." (p.5).
5. Punishment should be administered with caution to avoid discouraging the learners from learning to play the keyboard. It should be used sparingly and as a last resort.

Summary on Guidelines for the Teaching/Learning of the Keyboard

Keyboard playing for students of music should go beyond giving students their examination pieces which they memorize and vomit during their practical examinations.

To the Teachers:

1. Break the keyboard (piano) syllabus into achievable lesson periods to be achieved within a stipulated time.
2. Start with the rudiments/theory of music which is the backbone to real piano playing. Get the students acquainted with the rudiments of music relevant for keyboard playing.
3. The content of the lesson must be developed according to the duration of the lesson. A keyboard lesson of 40 minutes should have the content broken into 4 sub-headings.
4. The learners must be set induced by revising their previous lesson and getting them to play their take home assignment before the commencement of a new lesson.
5. The learners should be exposed to etudes (studies) e.g. Scales, arpeggios, and other fingering exercises, at this stage.
6. After the rudiments, begin until the location of notes on the keyboard and associate them with the notes on the scores. The student's eyes should be fixed on the scores. They should not look at the notes of the keyboard except when the distance between the two notes they are to locate is wide. This aspect may seem unattainable at the beginning, but with the right skills, the learners will get over it. Graduate from location of 2 to 3 to 4 notes etc. as the case may be.
7. Sight reading exercises must be very simple at this stage ranging from 3 to 4 notes. Reading the scores and playing them without looking at the keyboard must be the priority of the learner. The teacher must insist on that even if it takes ages to be accomplished.
8. The sight reading piece may be approached from key C with a simple piece such as the one below.

Piano

5 5 5 5 5 5s

9. The fingering at this stage must be adhered strictly to in order to conquer the challenge of moving the fingers from note to note. This type of piece must be mastered and given at least two weeks practice before giving the learners a new piece that is a little more challenging.

Keyboard Harmony

The students should be made to be conversant with the Western harmonic structures before being exposed to keyboard harmony. The learner will be made to begin with a music as simple as the one below in two parts (root positions).

4

u u u u u u

4 3 2 1 2 1

5 4 1 5

7

A simple piece or score as this should be mastered at this level before attempting pieces in three to four parts.

To the Learner:

1. The learner must own a keyboard or hire one and must be ready to work with the piano teacher.
2. The learner must master the location of musical notes on the keyboard without burying his eyes on the keyboard and then through imaginative thinking associate the notes of the keyboard with their musical notes on the staves.
3. Must be conversant with note values, and rhythmic patterns to be able to make progress.
4. He must be ready to sacrifice his time and energy to learn.
5. Each piano assignment must be done diligently.
6. The learner must follow the step by step approach tutorial to be able to achieve his aim. He should avoid impatience or being in a hurry to start playing challenging pieces.

7. He must learn the piano etudes (studies) for her fingers to be flexible.
8. Difficult sections of any set piece must be given enough time to be able to tackle them.
9. The learner must not give up at any point in time but must continue making effort to play.
10. Personal practice is inevitable. The learner must make out time at least two hours daily to practice. It could be once or split into two or four sessions of two hours at a stretch, one hour in two sessions, thirty minutes in four sessions.
11. The learner must own a good piano tutorial and follow the lessons and assignments persistently without skipping anyone.
12. Decide to make it, and you will make it as a woman keyboardist.
13. The learner must not be in a hurry trying to play at sight by reading the notes of the staff and trying to play the notes with the eyes on the keyboard. The learner cannot go far this way. It can take quite some time to master this. You can look at the keyboard in keyboard harmony and still succeed because it is meant for contemporary popular music but the learned cannot do that in sight-playing.

Conclusion

Keyboard playing is a very interesting task but highly demanding in terms of time and self-discipline. Every learner must have a tutorial or guide book for keyboard playing. Only good keyboardists should be assigned to student pianists. It is a very lucrative job because good keyboardists are sought after by different organizations and institutions. The female learners should not by any means be intimidated by their gender as weaker vessels but must rise and shine in keyboard playing.

The female piano learner should be treated cautiously because women are highly emotional and easily put off when reprimanded. Women are more persevering and this attribute will be an advantage in learning the keyboard because keyboard learning requires perseverance. The guidelines/Theories of learning provided in this study must be given consideration to by the women folk if they must feature like their male counterparts as Nigeria female organists and pianists.

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