ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF CHORAL MUSIC PEDAGOGY IN NIGERIA: TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Issues surrounding formal education in Nigeria are multifaceted. As noted by Fafunwa (1985), from time immemorial of formal schooling, "Nigerian schools were being coached and taught to meet the requirements of a foreign culture and not in the culture of Nigeria" (p.5). Christian missionaries came with the Western-style of musical training to Nigeria during the late nineteenth century. In mission schools and church choirs, singing, ear training, sight-reading and organ playing were taught. According to Mackey (1950), "these trainings were aimed at 'refining' the Nigerian musical sense and taste" (p.130). The first set of Nigerians trained by the Westerners in their kind of music came from the mission schools planted by the Westerner and majority of them were men and women who were members of the mission churches. By 1960, "a degree could be obtained in music at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka" (Edet, 1965:77). Three decades after the exit of the colonial masters from Nigeria, music education generally has not succeeded in establishing a standard national base in the schools of Nigeria. The study therefore, intends to go a long way to help in resolving knotty issues that have bedeviled the smooth training of choirs in Port Harcourt. Choir trainers will also seek better improvement in their musical arts and performance while choral directors will see the urgent need to be in tune with best practices and improve their craft.

The Problem

The ideal situation should be that music literacy should be taught without any challenges. At first, it seems that teaching music in schools is going on well but from a close look, teachers are experiencing various issues and challenges which impede the adequate teaching and learning of choral music in the various groups. These issues and challenges could be as a result of the knowledge level of the

teachers, student diversity in terms of expectation, motivation and cultural background. This suggests that there could be quite a number of issues and challenges that hinders the teaching and learning of choral music; hence, the rationale for the study to identify the issues and challenges affecting the teaching and learning of choral music across three choral groups in Port Harcourt. The study intends to find out the issues and challenges that militate against effective teaching and learning of choral music in the three selected choirs and possibly proffer possible solutions to the problems.

Concept of Choir

A choir is a collection of vocalists/singers that perform together. Choirs may sing without instrumentation or with the reinforcement of a piano or pipe organ, with a little troupe or with a full orchestra of seventy (70) to over a hundred (100) persons. The articulation "Choir" has the assistant significance of a division of a gathering. In typical eighteenth to 21st-century oratorios and masses, tune or choir is ordinarily fathomed to gather more than one craftsman for each part, rather than the gathering of four of soloists moreover incorporated into these works (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choir).

Concept of Music Teaching

Since history, man has always searched for facts about music that are yet unknown, questions about music that have remained unanswered and effect or outcomes of music that have not been properly estimated (Mbanugo, 2009:123). Different choral teachers have different approaches to choral teaching but all have one objective in mind – to bring out the best in the voices they work on. In teaching choral, the teacher should create an atmosphere of friendliness during classes with the students, this is essential as it affects the way the students receive instructions and directives. Onyiuke (2003) notes that:

> Within the music class the teacher should make adequate effort to establish a favourable musical knowledge, understanding, and responsiveness. The teacher should provide both stimulating and challenging environment where the child [the learner] can explore to achieve his/her objectives (p.69).

An atmosphere devoid of friendliness and kindness hampers choral teaching, therefore, establishing an interest in your students will make them come out of their shells and be themselves and also learn well. A choral teacher should be able to keep what is unique about an individual voice and still give the student the tools he/she needs to make it better. He/she should deal with his/her students in the choir as individuals with different background, exposure and disposition. In line with this, Cranmer (1974) comments thus: "The teaching of singing is a most personal and individual job, and because the whole of singing is done by the singer himself each pupil becomes a separate problem" (p.59). A choir needs the guidance of a teacher in its learning. Self-learning may not go well with practice like choral. Graves (1954) cited in Ugoo-Okonkwo (2013) supports the idea of having a teacher to teach singing as she postulates:

> *Music, the arts and languages cannot be acquired without a teacher, and the role of the teacher is not only to import information and correct errors but also to record progress, to create enthusiasm and lead the way to the mountain tops (p.32).*

Following the above assertion, it stands to reason that it is essential to have a choral teacher to teach the students. Singing cannot be learnt from books. Books only give ideas which a choral teacher can use in putting his students through. In choral teaching, both the teacher and the taught have their parts to play to make it work. In the words of Henderson (1979:166), "It takes many elements in developing a vocal artist. Commitment almost always ranks first, the vocal instrument second, musicianship very near to the first two, and then come personal appearance (charisma) and inner drive".

The role of music teacher in music teaching cannot be overemphasized. Teachers are important and make a difference. Their role goes well beyond information giving. They have both the right and the responsibility to develop a climate in the classroom which supports effective learning. Understanding teaching has presented persistent and formidable challenges to those who have sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning over the years. The quality of teaching is a crucial factor in promoting effective learning in schools. In a bid to develop mature teachers who could demonstrate identifiable competences as musicians as well as educators, the Music Educators National Conference

appointed a commission in 1968 on Teacher education to make recommendations for the improvement of the education of music teachers. In its report, the commission stated that;

> *The development of music teacher competencies should form the total program of the music teacher training institutions. The demonstration of competence, rather than the passing of the course, should be the deciding factor in certification. This means that proficiency test, practical application of historical, theoretical and stylistic techniques and advance standing procedures should be employed, that screening procedures for admission to the program should be enforced and that an adequate means of final assessment should be developed and implemented (Abeles, Hoffer & Klotman, 1984).*

The commission during the four years between 1968 and 1972, not only developed a set of recommendations designed to strengthened the training of individuals preparing to be music educators but also identified qualities and competencies necessary for such teachers.

Theoretical Framework – Theory of Deskilling

Apple (1982) proposes his theory of the deskilling of teachers in the way that curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation are standardized or pre-packaged. Choral music educators/teachers are part of the "deskilled" discourse. Teachers become isolated executors of someone else's plans, procedures, and evaluative methods. Control of the classroom is taken out of the hands of teachers by allowing them only to execute the prescribed curriculum as opposed to developing it. Specifically, in the choral arena, school traditions, competitions, and show choirs are possible mandated components of a choral programme. A teacher may feel constricted in the ability to control and develop a choral programme that best suits the educational goals within the critical paradigm as well as the individual needs of the students. A prescribed choral agenda can override the creative programming that teachers should be empowered to design. Another deterrent of a teacher's practice rooted in a critical pedagogy involves constituencies outside of the choral classroom often dictating the number of concerts that must be performed each year. Often, those concerts become caricatures of the dominant culture with unspoken demands of repertoire that will please the majority. For example, a

choral teacher may feel obligated to continue the tradition of a Christmas concert even though that teacher may feel that a programme with multiple themes may be a more appropriate educational goal for the students. Resistance to unfamiliar styles and genres of music can cause the choral teacher to give in to the demands of the larger community. The nature of choral music education is more product-oriented than process-oriented. A process-oriented choral curriculum would represent a comprehensive musicianship format where students would be studying theory, history, and culture as related to the choral selection. This comprehensive approach to learning choral selection is often time-consuming, and therefore, could limit the amount of literature that could be learned or the number of performances that could occur.

Hodges (2003) is of the opinion that many aspects of knowledge systems can be learned informally through the means of observation and imitation. In many African societies, music literacy is taught informally as opposed to many Western cultures. Matsika (2012) defines informal education as,

> The education one acquires from the experiences of everyday life activities where the wisdom of elders becomes the encyclopedia of reference while formal education systems are those that emphasize the need for a qualified teacher to teach learners in the classroom (p.34).

However, formal learning processes are equally important since they are like keys that unlock all domains to realize the human full potential in learning systems. In this study, whether formal or informal, the bottom line is that the development of music literacy in all given situations regardless of the means or context in which it is taught. In all cases, learners should be equipped with skills in reading, analyzing, creating and accepting other people's musical practices.

In the teaching and learning processes, various approaches can be used in the classroom situation. John Dewey (1934) advocates for the discovery methods in his approach to, and regard for music as "both the lowest and the highest of the arts" (p.238). Jerome Bruner describes discovery methods as progressive methods of teaching whereby children will be allowed to learn freely to discover new traits. He goes further to say that children will remember knowledge and concepts discovered on their own. Abraham A. Schwadron (cited in Mark 2013)

writes that; "our school philosophy should recognize the school as a logical agency for socio-musical change and critical examination of aesthetic needs". (p. 123). Barret (2011) then suggests a cultural psychological approach to music learning. She writes:

> *It provides opportunities to look more deeply into practices of music education in order to understand the role that culture plays in shaping: children's musical learning and thinking; teacher's music teaching and learning; formal and informal institutions and structures within and through which learning and teaching occur; and the intersection of those processes in the development of musical thought and practice. (p. 5).*

Abrahams (2005) says that Piaget laid a foundation for experience-based learning when he encouraged teachers to plan experiences that put children in an environment enabling them to explore, manipulate, experiment and question. Various methods to music literacy can be suggested but accordingly, there is a need for teaching music literacy appropriately in Nigeria because the current educational situation has its own demands and challenges hence the need to foster a sound arts environment. Strumpf (2001) writes that "music classes in Nigerian schools should reflect the Nigerian culture as much as possible in areas of music appreciation and practical work" (p. 9). This is a good observation because the practical music policies in Nigeria must be based on cultural practices.

Issues of Music Pedagogy

Issues pertaining to teaching and learning of music cannot be concluded in a day. One needs to continuously reflect on what has been achieved so far by analyzing what is really taking place inside and outside of the classroom. The writer's perception of the appropriate music literacy pedagogy is guided by representative views from both sampled African and Western scholars. From their contributions on appropriate music literacy pedagogy, it is evident that many African music educators and philosophers support the view that active participation; apprenticeship and use of the mother tongue are useful methods in developing music literacy. However, to some extent, some scholars emphasize the incorporation of movement and dance, affiliation, traditional practices that run within families, recruiting those with the potential to learn and ethnic based

teaching approaches as ideal methods to bring about music literacy. The pedagogical approaches used by many Nigerian teachers include rote learning, lecture method, recitation, demonstration and group work. Therefore, the appropriateness of these pedagogies was looked at from the contributions of the renowned theories and philosophies of the sample Western and African music educators. Moreover, the pedagogical challenges experienced by these teachers were investigated from the perspectives of their training and school practice or dimensions.

African and Western music teaching approaches share some common attributes in their application and usability calling for a marriage of the two should be done to enhance the teaching of music literacy in schools. For example, both methods emphasize the role of singing in mother tongue, and early childhood development programmes, the need for the use of demonstration, rhythmic activities, apprenticeship, creativity, self-expression and the involvement of all children in the learning process. So if these methods are put together to effective use, some improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of music literacy teaching in the classroom will reach higher levels. This may be the reason why most philosophers recommend a Teacher-Child-Child (TCC) approach to music literacy learning because they are of the conviction that children can also teach themselves easily. For example, they can teach one another some new songs as they play through methods such as game songs. This allows learners to learn the same concepts and moving at the same pace. Again it demonstrates their resourcefulness in terms of song collection. They always do this with a competitive mindset to out-do one another in collecting and singing songs although there is a danger that they might teach one another the wrong things altogether. Therefore, the role of teachers is to oversee the affairs of music literacy development in schools through working in close partnership with learners and parents in an attempt to bring music literacy programmes to fruition.

Research Design
The study adopts a survey approach that involves a triangulated data collection process. It also involved a description of the emerging themes and patterns. As this research study was quantitative, the phenomenological approach

to qualitative studies through the administration of in-depth interviews, rehearsal observations and document analysis data generating methodologies was done.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Here three choral music groups were purposefully selected by the researcher based on their pedagogical approaches used in teaching and learning choral music. The three groups in Port Harcourt City were made up of a school, a church choir and a choral group namely:

- University of Port Harcourt Concert Choir,

- Christ Church Choir and

- Royal Male Choir of Port Harcourt City.

These chosen groups are in Port Harcourt City and are in close proximity to one another. They share similar characteristics in terms of age group of students, type of music they sing, administration strategies, and choral music teacher recruitment processes. So, from the three participating groups, three choral music teachers were selected through purposive sampling procedures. The teachers that were sampled were both specialists and generalists. Their selection was based on their experience and qualifications as music teachers in their respective groups.

Instrument of Data Collection

A research questionnaire entitled "Questionnaire on Choir Training (QCT)" for music students was used while structured interview questions for oral interview for the music instructors were designed for the purpose of this study. Copies of the questionnaire were issued to the music students of the different choral groups used for this study. The structured interview questions were used for oral interviews for the music directors.

Method of Data Collection

The primary source of data collection for the study was oral interview for the music directors and structured questionnaire for the music students tagged "Questionnaire on Choir Training (QCT)". Secondary sources of data collection included, research papers, books, journals, publications, etc. Data collection

techniques can be divided into three major categories: Experiencing (rehearsal observations), examining (document analysis) and Enquiry (Oral interview and Questionnaires).

Results on Issues and Challenges of Teaching and Learning of Choral Music

Pedagogy: On the pedagogical approaches utilized by these music directors to teach choral music, the first respondent confirmed that he uses both theoretical and practical approaches to teach choral music. He incorporates a comprehensive musicianship approach in his choral program where music theory is taught and assessed, and other musical topics are introduced, including guitar, reggae, musical theatre, composition and world music. He added that he uses both theoretical and practical teaching approaches ensure effective music skill transfer to the students.

According to another participant in the study, he uses the pedagogy of vocal production (for example he uses kinesthetic cues to help students understand musical concepts) and metaphors to teach students to help them understand how to produce the sound. He understands vocal pedagogy and finds ways to make content comprehensible and master teaching techniques to ensure knowledge transfer in a unique way to his students.

The third participant explains how he has the students mark their music for places to breathe, but usually after they have been rehearsing the piece several times. Another method he uses is making students accountable and keeping them the on task through music reading aids. He also uses the teaching strategy of demonstrating the wrong way and then the correct way to help the students understand what they should be doing. He spends a significant amount of time on vocal production and uses appropriate techniques to achieve this high quality sound. This individualizing teaching strategy to maximize chance of success has paid off very well for him as a choral music teacher. In summary, Kodály methodology drives his pedagogy; he is a firm believer in its usefulness in creating young musicians.

Roles of music director:

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Remark
1	Selects a musical objective or concept within a piece and devises an exercise to teach the objective and evaluates whether the objective is met	77	32	8	3	120	3.52	Accepted
2	Ensures that rehearsal plans are presented in a linear fashion and learning in a choral context is sequential	46	62	15	9	120	3.41	Accepted
3	Ensures proper vocal technique in teaching and learning choral music	39	73	7	1	120	3.25	Accepted
4	Contributes to the growth and improvement of the teaching and learning of choral music	29	76	10	5	120	3.07	Accepted

The choral music directors play significant roles in the teaching and learning of choral music in their various groups. All the choral music directors agreed to have served an administrative role first before serving as a music director. According to

one of the respondents, every music director must understand his choir and attain to the basic administrative needs of the choir. Another respondent posited that, the music director must be good at what he does to inspire the choir. He must be seen as a role model to the choir in the act of singing. He should be humane and easily accessible by the choir. He should be flexible enough to accept the worst chorister as long as the chorister is enthusiastic about learning choral music. His styles should easily be copied by his choir. More so, a music director must carry the affairs of the choir as his first priority to ensure the proper functioning of the choir. He must be willing to accept that weakness of the choir and have the courage to work on improving the weakness of the choir to make it become better.

Another respondent in the study added that, his role as a music director goes far beyond just teaching choral music. He is also serving as a role model and a source of inspiration to his students to pursue their music career, which is very vital. "Setting standards for them to aim for is important to me... he asserts". He is able to achieve this through his vocal modeling and teacher personality which are energetic; he helps build confidence by singing with the students; his teacher behaviours assist in meeting goals. More so, he places importance on student-centered discovery learning and uses familial mentorship influenced knowledge and action in the classroom. Thus he uses the comprehensive musicianship approach to the choral music programme to help him achieve a role as a music director. He said that if he can help her students discover the talent inherent in them and harness the talent to it full capacity, then his role as a music director has been achieved.

Consequently, imparting the right kind of music attitudes in his students. This will go a long way in making them succeed in their music careers. However, he said that he was using a flexible leadership style which encourages the students in his class to share their knowledge of choral music with one another. He continued that shared knowledge encourages team work and increases their chances of working together as a team. He added that, his role as a music director does not end at teaching them how to sing but helping them to appreciate the importance of team work because for them to succeed in real life, they must learn how to work with other human beings effectively and efficiently through shared knowledge and ideas.

Challenges of teaching and learning of choral music:

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Remark
1	Lack of technical skills to interpret staff notations	35	69	5	11	120	3.07	Accepted
2	Adequate musical background by choristers	16	12	49	43	120	2.01	Rejected
3	Lack of standard routine for teaching choral music.	31	79	3	7	120	3.12	Accepted
4	Frequent absence from rehearsals was not a problem	11	21	45	43	120	2.00	Rejected
5	Nonchalant attitude of chorister was a problem	41	64	8	7	120	3.16	Accepted
6	Poor remuneration of choir administration to their chorister was not a problem	10	15	52	43	120	1.93	Rejected

Other challenges: These include;
1. Use of outdated curricula for the teaching and learning of choral music was observed as one of the challenges faced across the selected choral groups. The researcher observed that songs taught ten years ago were still being taught as at the time of the study. This has made the teaching and learning of choral music boring as the students get tired of singing the same song over and over again.

2. Poor attitude of the students towards learning choral music was one of the major problems that all the choral group directors faced as some of their strong singers are occasionally absent from rehearsals. The issue of indiscipline was another problem that the music directors faced during the choral rehearsals. Misbehaviour of students during rehearsals, which composed mostly of talking, lack of participation, and poor posture were also raised.

3. Behavioural issues were observed among the student such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and this has been particularly challenging to the choir at times. More so, problem of poor attitude of students during rehearsals were observed.

4. Lack of creativity and understanding of the musical culture and applying same in the teaching and learning of choral music was an observed issue. This particular issue was pedagogically based including breath control, increasing vocal range, and sight-reading. It brought about the students' inability to take correct posture that will assist breathing even when metaphors were being used.

Suggestions on Possible Solutions

Among many suggestions that can lead to possible solutions to these issues and challenges facing choral music pedagogy in Nigeria are the following:

a. There should be updates in the choral music curricula used by the music schools. New songs should be composed and taught by these choral music schools to help rekindle the interest of their students.

b. Choral music teachers should include students in behavioral disciplinary measures during rehearsals which will help improve their attitudes towards learning of choral music. Proper incentive measures must be put in place to encourage students for good behavior. More so, making students to be responsible for their actions will help them checkmate their behaviours during rehearsals.

c. Choral music rehearsals should be carried out in an environment that will stimulate mental creativity among the students. Students' opinions should sometimes be asked by the teacher to encourage team work which will in turn boost students' morale and encourage creativity.

d. Incentives for efforts and outstanding achievements should be put in place for choral music teachers in teaching choral music in schools. More so, professional development of choral music teachers should be encouraged by various administrations.

Conclusion

The pedagogical approaches/teaching methods used by choral music directors in the teaching of choral music in the three selected choirs in Port Harcourt include incorporating both theory and practice for effective music transfer to the students. There is the use of vocalization as a set induction skill for the teaching/learning process. Other approaches used include direct reading of scores by the students through the help of the director or instructor. Rote learning approach is also employed in the teaching/learning process. The music director roles were not just to teach choral music but to also provide the role model image for them to emulate morally and professionally. The choral music directors serve significant roles in their various choirs. These are administrative, advisory and instructional roles.

Many problems militate against effective teaching and learning of choral music in the three selected choirs in Port Harcourt. Poor attitude of students was the most significant problem observed from the study. Other problems include; inability to read scores and so rote learning cannot be avoided, absence from rehearsals, lateness to rehearsals, nonchalant attitudes of some choristers, problem of traffic jam on the road which lead to lateness to rehearsals, poor remuneration, etc.

Choral music teachers of the groups under study mostly used metaphors to help them teach choral music and to transfer knowledge to their students. This method showed to be very valuable to the students because they confirmed to have learnt a lot through this method. The method employed by choral music teachers in Nigeria in the teaching and learning process was predominantly

problem-solving techniques where the music teacher listens to the students sing and spots out the errors and makes the correction and ensures that they repeat until they get it right.

On the possible solutions to problems militating against the teaching and learning of music, behavioural disciplinary measures must be put in place to check mate students' behaviour during rehearsals, rehearsals should be carried out in a stimulating environment and professional development of choral music teachers should be encouraged by the school administration.

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