

**IMPROVED MUSIC TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
A WAY TO OBTAIN MUSICAL LITERACY**

By

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ABSTRACT

It is generally assumed that improved music education can lead to a better understanding of music as well as an increased ability to evaluate musical ideas. This implies that the type of education needed to achieve this must be developed in terms of creative ability. Music being practical oriented in nature cannot be successfully taught through the conventional 'talk and chalk method. Its teaching in this case, should reflect the processes and strategies of music. That is, the learner-centered methods should however replace the traditional teacher-centered methods of teaching that characterized the teacher as all knowing with the responsibility of transferring his unquestionable knowledge and skills to learners who are adjudged empty with the role of merely confirming answers rather than investigate problems. Experience has shown that such situation in which the teacher gives and the student just receives does not improve students' mastery of the Concepts and skills. This paper therefore examines how effective activity teaching - learning can improve music literacy among secondary school Students.

KEYWORDS: Improved, Music, Teaching, Secondary School and Musical Literacy

INTRODUCTION

In considering music in the programme of secondary education, it is well conceived of music experience as beginning with birth. In a very real sense, one might say that the potentialities of music are inside human beings. According to the developmental point of view, the origin of music is in man distant past (Elliot 1995). An implication of this for teachers in the secondary school is that music need not to be thought of as something foreign to the children they teach. Music today, with its discoveries and inventions, is the product of feelings or urges in men and women through ages. These same urges can be seen in children if they are allowed to follow their natural drives. That is, by using the sense of smelling, tasting, feeling, seeing and hearing in their learning situation. Children depend upon impulse, fancy, creative activities, play activities and logical thinking. If these natural impulses are not harnessed and developed, students exhibit non-challant attitudes towards the subject, hence could not perform better. The goal of music education in secondary schools according to the National Policy on Education (2004), is that music education should inculcate the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and play. A critical look at these goals is a pointer to the fact that the answer to the societal problems staring us in the face lies in our ability to practice music rather than theorize it. Therefore, the musical growth of children and their motivation to engage in activities in music instructions are

significantly influenced by strategies and materials that the teacher adopts in the teaching-learning situation.

THE TERM, MUSICAL LITERACY

Although there has not been a definite way of defining the term, music literacy has come to be used either as a basis for establishing objectives for school programmes or to guide music instruction in schools (Asaju, 2007). Music literacy can be inferred from the context of the attributes of a musically literate person. Some of these attributes are in the following abilities; to

- Think critically and perform music
- Develop the spirit of inquiry and creativity make decisions in personal. Civic and national affairs artistically.
- Develop democratic and resourceful behaviour toward the environment.
- Become knowledgeable in both the processes and products of music as well as exhibiting attitudes.

For the purpose of this study however, musical literacy would mean the ability of someone (who has been exposed to at least a little portion of music instruction) to exhibit all of the above or even more. Literacy in music is all about being able to use the knowledge of music to make valuable decisions in Citizenship matters such as democracy, environment and economy. Music is life and life is music. It IS a cycle that only ignorance can break. For example, a five year old child does not need to be told that rhythm is music. Who will tell him? The parents or teachers (that is, if he is in school). Also someone needs to explain to the child that in performing rhythmic games they are responding to basic beats in music.

WHY MUSICAL LITERACY?

It is generally assumed that improved music education can lead people to a better understanding of music as well as an increased ability to evaluate musical ideas. The continued existence of misconceptions over a long period of time could be taken as one reflection of the effectiveness of music education. If this idea is accepted, music literacy should help remove unfolded beliefs. Literacy in music as an objective of Nigeria education is urgently needed as much as the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. A musically literate person must have curiosity, manipulative ability and mechanical comprehension, good spatial visualization, adaptability and spontaneous flexibility, initiatives, concentration, industry and enthusiasm. He/she must have the ability to plan, design and conduct. Investigations. All these attributes expected of a musically literate person point to the fact that music teaching is more than 'stuffing' the heads of the learners with music contents. It entails the ability of the music teacher to teach music as it is and not as he thinks music is. Music is built upon reasoning, problem - solving and change. The task of music education entails the provision of an education which makes it possible for students to understand today's world and at the same time be prepared to meet the unknown challenges of tomorrow. In Nigeria, the music curriculum is written with a fixed body of content learned in a rote manner, and out of context with the inquiry processes generating the specific knowledge. The mind of the student is treated as a storehouse to be filled with knowledge rather than one to be viewed as an instrument of critical thinking, investigation, curiosity and creativity. This has turned students into 'robot' whose brains are not made to think and act but programmed to act accordingly.

Music is based on action and students can only improve their leaning of it through active participation in the teaching-learning situation skills (Essien, 2008). Music as a dynamic and practical task requires problems that arise from this task. This however, demands willingness to make new observations, to repeat experiments, to consider new facts, and to challenge earlier conclusions Music is far from a finished subject in fact, it is likely it is only in its beginnings. The best information at a musician's disposal at any me time will be needed to revise in keeping with future discoveries. If his is so. The content of music in secondary schools should not be considered as set and fixed all around children are evidences of changes but music taught to them at this impressionable age remains unchanged. Hence there is a conflict between what is taught to students and what they see around them Any wonder then, why students run away from music and music-oriented career at the: secondary school level. Same of the students complain that music is too difficult: 1 get confused easily; too many things to draw; it involves only singing and dancing.

IMPROVED MUSIC IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Music as a school subject should be far more than description and history. Music is a way of thinking and acting both in school and out of school its education will not produce its full impact a students' lives until it permeates thought and action (Asaaju. 2007). Actualization of this impact will however depend on the teaching of music that goes beyond mere recapitulation of facts and principles. Music is a creative task that needs a creative teacher to create: a class full of creative activities that can help develop artistic attitudes in students. Any poor or 'stiff presentation of music concepts can prevent students from developing in secondary schools. Attitude that will certainly affect choices made at tertiary level and even adult life. This implies that whatever foundation is laid for them will either help them to cope effectively with their environment or destroy it albeit, ignorantly. The music teacher should look into a variety of procedures in teaching music. Routine or dogmatic methods should give way to Scientific methods that can help students develop music skills. In essence, music teaching should be activity-centered, flexible and systematic to provide a sound basis for artistic knowledge, skills and techniques which will form a foundation for musical literacy (Akindchim. 1986). Meaningful activities offer students a wider experience in investigative skills which in turn will provide the stimulus for further musical explorations. The extensive nature of music makes it almost impossible for anyone to learn all of it in an entire life time. IL is also obvious that a teacher cannot teach it all. Therefore, that little portion of music taught to students should be taught in such a way that, that might be the child's last encounter with music. The question of how much content of music IS taught IS not really so great important as is the question of what content of music is taught and how it is taught (Nicholl, 1982). Any music curriculum must closely relate both content and method of teaching it. This implies that a well prepared lesson can become a nullity. Or an exercise in futility if the method of disseminating the content is faulty. As noted by Washita (1966), a good music teacher must know what he is going to teach (subject matter), how (the method) he is going to teach it, why (the objective) he is teaching it and the learning outcomes he wants his students to achieve. This onus task of a teacher finding answers to these curriculum questions: why, how, what, when, can only be performed by a. creative teacher who is ready to go all the way

with his students in the learning process. Music should be taught to stimulate the interest of students. This is done by making learning fun and creating environment that is lively and conducive for learners. Meaningful activities that can spur students into action should be provided and students should be made sometimes to work together as a team for a common goal. Teachers should recognize the need for increased utilization of sensory materials in the teaching learning of music. These sensory materials (especially musical instruments) should be principally those that are found in the child's environment as these better aid the child's understanding of musical concepts. In this way, the student is encouraged to experience music first hand by performing, discussing, observing, playing, explanations etc. Such students centered learning does not give room for a teacher-dominated lesson but the teacher becomes a guide in an open-ended enquiry environment. Music classroom, in most cases, has been turned into a cinema house where the passive audience watch in silence the viewing screen. The teacher does all the talking and the students merely watch with little or no input except for some intermittent noddings or snappy responses of either 'yes or no' to the teacher's question, 'do you understand?' Music teaching should be moved away from the cinema 'theatre' to 'theatre of investigation' where problems could be solved musically.

ACTIVITY TEACHING-LEARNING

Activity teaching implies the instructional strategy where the students overtly participate and become responsible for their learning. By activity method, we mean any method of teaching that places the learner at the centre of the instructional effort. It is a teaching-learning through practice (Onwuka, 1981). To that effect, the activities of the learners should be the thrust of the lesson and all activities presented should enhance creativity and resourcefulness among students. When music is taught practically, that is by activity method, the students usually participate actively, discover new situations and learn. This is because when a child learns by doing, he is likely to learn more since learning by doing is an aspect of discovery learning. Activity teaching is very useful in the process of skills subjects like music. As an action technique, it clarifies the purposes of drills, shows correct motions, and serves to motivate the learners (i.e., 2006). The non-application of this method in the teaching of music results in a situation where the graduates do not acquire enough knowledge and basic skills needed for effective functioning in today's society. Activity implies to actively learn. Quite simply, it is involving students directly and actively in demonstrating selected learning experiences. This means that instead of simply receiving information verbally and visually, students are participating and doing. In other words, activity method is the process of engaging students in doing something in the class rather than just listening to a lesson and taking notes. Students in this case, are involved in the taking, darting, singing, playing, discussing, and composing. Most of the time, in atypical music classroom setting, students are involved only massively in learning that is, in listening to the teacher, looking at the chalkboard summary, and reading the textbook. Such passive involvement generally leads to a limited retention of knowledge by students. The implications of this is that to be actively involved in learning situation, all senses as prominent vehicles of communications must be employed. This means that what is demonstrated must be seen, heard and done by students to foster participation.

MUSIC ACTIVITIES AT SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

To be effective, music activities at this level should include such elements as telling, showing classifying, playing, composing, conforming, singing, questioning etc. Instances where these elements can be employed are discussed below:

- **Instrument Performance:** Experimenting with sounds made by individual instruments, identifying names and pictures of instruments, classifying instruments according to the way they are made (e.g. wood, metal, skin, brass, strings, etc.), discussing the nature of the sounds made (for example, thinking, clanging sounds, clashing, rattling, jingling and so on), the way they are played (hit, scraped, plucked, blown, bowed, etc.) and matching pictures or names of instruments to sound heard, individual instrumental work and group work such as orchestral and instrumental. Ensemble performance.
- **Duration:** Moving to beat which goes quickly or slowly, listening to pieces of music to determine whether they move quickly or slowly, Singing songs and moving quickly or slowing as words dictate, improvising pieces of different speeds, performing echo song, maintaining beat/pulse while reciting rhymes, simple poems through movements such as marching, skipping, etc. Others are accenting beats for example, patting and clapping, rowing movements, swinging movement, echo clapping of rhythms, reading and writing activities, using pictures or symbols to represent rhythmic patterns. Pitch: Singing songs, rhymes, etc. which focus on spatial concepts of 'high' and 'low' pitch, approaching these activities through appropriate movements, reading and writing activities using body shapes to indicate pitch.
- **Composition:** Compositional activities can be learned by writing poems, using shot phrases, exploring sounds, selecting sounds, drafting and redrafting of ideas.
- **Dynamics:** Listening for loud and soft sounds in pieces of music played, producing loud and soft sounds on the same instruments and using these to improvise and compose simple songs, moving to a beat which goes quickly or slowly. Singing songs and moving quickly or slowly as words indicate.
- **Extra-Curricular Activities:** This includes concert performance, organization of music festivals, music club, dance and dramatic club, music exhibition, excursion, etc.

CONCLUSION

The problem who implemented the curricular and how it is implemented has been a current one. Though the goals of music education indicate a novel intention, there is no genuine interest in seeing to the achievement of these goals. A visit to any of our secondary schools will put the records straight. Hardly will one find any school where music is taught for a purpose, just the normal subject adding up to the number. Graduates from this level go to the university without having any serious or meaningful encounter with music at the secondary school level. Music is one of the core subjects in the first three years of secondary education. Why then is music relegated to the background at the secondary school level? The attitude of students towards the subject overtly or covertly will in a small measure determine their attitude towards the subject at a higher level. Also, the type of music learning encounters they have at this level will be a great determinant of the musical attitude that can foster their being musically literate the music together has a very important role to play in the whole matter. To effectively play that role will depend greatly on how, literate he is musically.

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