

APPLYING RHYTHM AS A CREATIVE PEDAGOGICAL TOOL IN MUSICAL ARTS EDUCATION IN LOWER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Music teachers generally face different challenges when it comes to teaching lower elementary school pupils the basic processes of understanding and acquiring the knowledge of what music is; and possibly discover themselves as emerging musicians. In other words, teaching music to this set of learners is not always easy because, the lesson is often held once a week. Additionally, these pupils might be in very different levels in terms of their previous musical knowledge and willingness to engage. For instance, some of the pupils may be entirely new to the school system, and that even the oldest may still possess short attention span. Therefore, the music teacher must develop different strategic goal setting of engaging his/her pupils with fun-filled activities that will make them to be active and work with all parts of their bodies and minds. This article explores the significance of incorporating rhythm as a creative pedagogical tool in musical arts education for lower elementary school students. It delves into the benefits of utilizing rhythm as a means to enhance students' musical understanding, creativity, and overall cognitive development. The article also discusses various strategies and approaches that educators can employ to effectively integrate rhythm into their teaching practices, ultimately enriching the musical learning experience for young learners. Adopting Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's (1865-1950) 'Eurhythmics' concept, the paper demonstrates the process of applying rhythm as a creative pedagogical tool in musical arts education of lower elementary schools. It also recommends a greater and intensive way of simplifying teaching methods of music to young learners, especially lower elementary school pupils in Nigeria, with the aid of these rhythmic activities in song, or poetry rhythm in the teaching of indigenous musical knowledge in Nigerian lower elementary schools.

Keywords: Rhythm, Music Pedagogy, Eurhythmics, Cognitive Development, Musical Arts Education.

Introduction

Scholars believe that early childhood education is indeed the foundation of all other levels of learning (Okafor, 1989; Anya-Njoku & Uzoma, 2021) . This elementary school education plays a crucial role in shaping a child's character and personality, and it provides them with the best opportunity to absorb knowledge and skills. As a result, it is essential to ensure that every child has the chance to develop their musical abilities through music education, as this is significant for their overall growth and development. The music “learnt at childhood is important as a foundation for learning other things ... art, craft, science, human relations, and social practices” (Okafor, 1989:21). Furthermore, The incorporation of music into lower elementary school's curricula aims to engage every student in diverse musical activities such as singing, listening, and enhancing their talents and abilities. This, in turn, nurtures a comprehensive skill set and deepens the students' understanding and appreciation of music as performers, thereby sparking their enthusiasm for further musical education in schools.

However, there is an ample evidence that the trend of standard musical arts education in Nigeria is currently at its lowest ebb than it was during the pre-colonial and colonial periods (Okafor, 1989). Whereas, this does not mean that there is shortage of music graduates in the country, but that majority of them are not gainfully employed. One of the reasons that can be deduced for this is the generalist program approach that is being deployed by the stakeholders of the educational sector in the country. This is a situation whereby “generalist' primary school teachers are expected not only to teach English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Physical Education and many other across curriculum perspectives, but also to have basic knowledge, skills and confidence to teach creative and cultural arts (CCA) which include music, visual arts, dance and drama (Obeng & Osei-Senyah, 2018).

These generalist teachers have degrees in other disciplines other than music and dance but they accidentally found themselves in line of music either because they play one instrument or the other within a band, or they are involved in their church music. Others pick up music as course of study, out of frustration of not meeting up with the requirements of courses their parents' desired for them to study (Olusoji, 2013) in the quest to get admission into the university. Majority of these would thereafter not be able to defend music certificate as music teachers, because they did not exert the required efforts while being students. This therefore means that they would not know the right method(s) to employ for the teaching and learning process of music studies at the lower elementary school level because they are not specialist

teachers.

Other major challenges facing music studies in Nigerian schools, generally, include lack of instructional aids and textbooks, and negative attitude of teachers towards the subject. It is pertinent to note that the roots of these problems can also be traced historically to the development of music as a school subject in Nigeria. First, the institutionalization of music as a school subject in Nigeria, was done only in some teachers training colleges and not in elementary schools. Ogisi (2019) argues that even in those institutions, "...the music education that was superimposed was ineffective in delivering the musical need of the society (p.2); and as a result, it was unable to achieve the necessary result.

Scholars asserted that Achimota College, in Ghana, was the only institution in the whole of West Africa in the early 1930s where music was taught as a compulsory subject (Kwami, 1994; p. 549). As noted by Vidal (2008), this is evident in the kind of music which was introduced to the Nigerian educational system, in order to serve the interests of the early Christian missionaries and the colonial government and in contrast to the Nigerian indigenous musical cultures. Despite the several attempts that have been made to correct this foundational error, Vidal (2008) noted that problem has remained persistent. In addition, he lamented the lack of research into the contents and teaching methods of music cultures and societies of Nigeria. Furthermore, Vidal noted the lack of necessary structures which would help concretize the new ideas on music education which was put in place after independence, in order to make music education functional and relevant to the needs of Nigeria and the African child.

These problems as identified in the foregoing statements, have led to the negative attitude of most parents towards the choice of music as career path by their wards. In order to make music instructions in the lower elementary level more effective and serve intended purpose such as training learners/pupils to engage in basic rudiments of music and the playing of musical instruments, there are keys factors to consider in the personality difference of pupils. This is in order to ensure that learners/pupils are able to gain from the lesson, regardless of their capabilities.

It is common knowledge that there are three groups of students/learners during the process of teaching and learning; and these are (a) visual (b) auditory (c) kinesics. Those in the visual group are students/pupils who absorb knowledge and their information while seeing demonstrations and illustrations of such lessons. Children in the auditory group can understand a concept and possibly imitate the teacher by hearing the sound of both what the teacher is

demonstrating and also by paying attention to what the teacher is saying. The pupils in the kinesic group, on the other hand, must replicate the demonstrations done by the teacher before they can comprehend the concept that the teacher has talked about. Studies have shown that with careful handling, lower elementary school pupils will not only understand the rudiments and theory of music but will also be able to effectively play musical instruments (Anderson, 2020). Therefore, in the lesson plan, the music teacher must consider these three groups in such a way that the pupils will substantially develop the "...capacity to comprehend and make use of the knowledge rather than carrying out (the) task in a mechanical fashion". (Cuttieta 2001:9).

To accomplish this feat, the music teacher must deploy differentiated teaching-learning methods which will meet each group at the point of its need, while at the same time engendering the interest of all the children in knowing more about the given task and other subsequent ones. Chike-Okodi (2006) emphasized the critical need to thoroughly assess and rectify the quality of output from primary schools in order to align with the current demands of global competitiveness. To this end, the teacher must introduce different rhythmic activities which are appropriate for the lesson in context. In light of the problems surrounding teaching and learning music in elementary schools, and in order to further enhance teaching and learning of music in elementary schools, this paper demonstrate the application of pedagogical tools in musical arts education in lower elementary schools.

Musical arts education plays a crucial role in fostering creativity, expression, and cognitive development in young learners. As educators seek to provide comprehensive and engaging music instruction to lower elementary school students, the integration of rhythm as a pedagogical tool holds immense potential. Rhythm, with its inherent connection to movement, pattern, and expression, offers a unique avenue for students to develop deeper understanding of music while honing essential skills. This paper highlights the value of incorporating rhythm into musical arts education and provide insights into effective strategies for its implementation.

Rhythm as a Concept

A specific definition or description of rhythm is rather complex in that it encompasses not only that of music but everything from the cosmic periodically of seasonal changes (Agawu 1995), and day to night cycle, to the organization of controlled movement of music in respect of time (Akpabot, 1998; Machlis & Forney, 1995); the tick-tock sound of the clock to the successive beats created by the wheels of the train as they move on the rail (Marcus, 2017). Rhythm is an important element of music, which determines

the pulse of music, thereby being at the center of coordination of body movement and melodic properties.

The Significance of Rhythm in Musical Arts Education

Rhythm serves as a foundational element in music, encompassing the organization of sound and time. For young students, engaging with rhythm not only cultivates a sense of beat and timing but also nurtures their ability to perceive and interpret musical patterns. Through rhythmic activities, students can develop a heightened awareness of musical structure, form, and phrasing, laying a strong foundation for their musical literacy. Furthermore, the physicality inherent in rhythm encourages kinesthetic learning, allowing students to embody musical concepts through movement and coordination.

The integration of rhythm in musical arts education offers multifaceted benefits for lower elementary school students. By actively engaging with rhythm, students can enhance their auditory discrimination skills, distinguishing various rhythmic patterns and articulations within music. Moreover, rhythm serves as a catalyst for creative expression, empowering students to improvise, compose, and interpret music with heightened rhythmic sensitivity. This creative engagement fosters a sense of musical autonomy and self-expression, nurturing students' confidence and passion for music. Furthermore, the cognitive benefits of integrating rhythm are noteworthy.

Research indicates that rhythmic training contribute to improved cognitive function, particularly in areas related to attention, memory, and executive functioning. Through rhythmic activities, students exercise their abilities to focus, sequence information, and synchronize actions, thereby bolstering their overall cognitive development. Additionally, the collaborative nature of rhythmic ensembles fosters social skills and teamwork, as students learn to coordinate their rhythmic contributions within a group setting.

Strategies for Integrating Rhythm into Musical Arts Education

Educators can employ various strategies to effectively integrate rhythm into their music instruction for lower elementary school students. Incorporating rhythmic games, body percussion exercises, and rhythmic notation activities can provide engaging avenues for students to internalize rhythmic concepts. Furthermore, integrating technology through rhythm-based educational apps and software can augment students' learning experiences, offering

interactive platforms for rhythmic exploration and practice. In addition, cross-curricular connections can enhance the integration of rhythm within the broader educational context. Collaborating with physical education teachers to explore rhythmic movement activities or linking rhythmic concepts to mathematical patterns can enrich students' understanding of rhythm while reinforcing interdisciplinary connections. Moreover, inviting guest musicians or percussionists to demonstrate rhythmic techniques can inspire and captivate young learners, expanding their exposure to diverse rhythmic traditions and styles.

From the foregoing, one notes that rhythm is ubiquitous and by this, the knowledgeable teacher has a myriad of ways by which he can introduce a more extensive use of Eurhythmics in music education of lower elementary schools and utilize it as part of the music activities in any aspect of his or her lesson. The Eurhythmics 'good rhythm' concept is a system of musical pedagogy developed by the Swiss theoretician and pedagogue, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865- 1950) to adequately develop kinesthesia in students. The concept allows the pupil/student, through the movement of parts of his/her body, to feel and transmit the musico-rhythmic sounds being taught by the teacher (Robinson, 2005).

It create a suitable environment for learning process which engage pupils in music-making activities that may be sufficiently internalised such that they can be intuitively reproduced when necessary. In other, words since these 'contexts of effort' is based on heard (externally and then internally) patterns, they enable the pupil to know, to better appreciate, and acquire the required skill(s) needed to create a better understanding and opportunity for the child to develop his musical abilities. So as the activity develops musicianship, it also serve as an induction into a new world of meanings and values; meanings and values that are 'encoded' in the musical activity but which also find their expression in other forms (Robinson, 2005).

Planning the class

The attention span of children is very short and therefore the music teacher needs to plan his lesson and make it child-centered enough to be interesting to his pupils, and within a short period of time. The epithet 'child-centered' indicates that "...the classroom should not be like a parade ground in which generation after generation of reluctant recruits are licked into shape; rather it should be permeated by a happy atmosphere." (Hirst & Peters, 1979:88). At this level of music education, the pupils are not required to be loaded with many theoretical concepts but to identify the pulse in music and be able to

repeat short rhythmic phrases confidently and correctly. Also, to recognize and respond to changes in tempo (i.e., speed of the pulse). At this stage, pupils' interest towards music have to be built, in order to make them develop a strong desire for music instructions.

According to Ojukwu (2013), music lesson plan starts from the scheme of work which is supposed to be “realistic and sensitive to the needs of the community where the school exists”. This would go a long way in solving the problem of music education content identified by Vidal (2008). Ojukwu noted the importance of further breakdown of the scheme of work into smaller units, in order to be able to cover the entire contents in few weeks. According to Ojukwu, this provides room for more individualized form of music instruction. The development and use of well structured lesson plan, alongside appropriate instructional materials allows the teacher to achieve intended objectives (Maduewesi, 1999; Ojukwu, 2013). Maduewesi identified the topic, duration, class, objectives, entry behavior, instructional materials, teaching strategies, instructional procedure, note and students' assignment as qualities which a good music lesson plan should possess. In other words, well prepared music lesson plan comprises of the topic, teaching method, instructional material and assessment (Ogunleye, 2004; Ojukwu, 2013).

Types of Instructional Aids

These refer to any set of sight or sound devices, or a combination of both, that assists an instructor in the student's learning process. To achieve the contextual objective of the lesson, the teacher must be versatile in using instructional aids that is suitable to the type of lesson taught and also ensure that media message presented is appropriate to the age and level of schooling of students. In other words, teaching aids must not only bring an element of reality into the teaching and learning process within the class but also reinforce motivation and enrich learning to make learners to participate actively during the lesson.

In addition, the set of instructional aids employed to enhance teaching and learning, should be such that will arouse and sustain both the attention and interest of the pupils concerned. Examples of such aids include self-made percussive instruments (empty biscuit boxes, plastic bottles, or cans filled with either rice grains, beans, pebbles, etc.), voices and actual musical instruments. Ikibe (2002), states that learning music is better done by handling musical instruments, listening to musical items, and singing.

Creative Use of Rhythm in Music Instructions

Using rhythm to teach music in class is simply a way of involving the pupils actively in the teaching and learning process through activity-based or play-way method (Salami 2006:253). This method promotes child-centered learning whereby the pupils actively participate in learning by engaging and finding both interest and enjoyment in the activity-based task. Ogisi (2019) notes that, children should be encouraged to perform music as early as possible because there are latent abilities capable of being musically aroused and trained in them. Creative use of rhythm to teach music will not only engender the interest and attention of the pupils throughout the lesson period but will also promote a better understanding of the concept.

As mentioned earlier in the foregoing, rhythm in itself is not a unilateral concept but an orderly movement of sound which closely allied with physical activity and body movement (Machlis & Fourney, 1995:12). In other words, rhythm does not only appear in songs but in poetry as well as in other musical sounds. For example, in teaching the lines and spaces of the music staff, the teacher introduces poetry which reads thus:

The Music Staff has five lines
 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 - 5
 Five lines
 Just like my fingers
 Five lines
 And Four spaces
 1 - 2- 3 – 4 Spaces
 Four Spaces
 Just like my fingers
 Four Spaces.

The pupils, in turn, render this in a *choreo-poetical* rap style and accompanied with simple rhythmic patterns which are played on selected pre-arranged musical instruments. Niyi Osundare (*personal communication, 2020*) states that choreo-poem is poetry with music, dance, and song, the tempo varying according to the mood and meaning of each section. The beat pattern which is used for this is the hip-hop beat. To develop a sense of pulse and reinforce an understanding of rhythm, the teacher might ask a group of pupils to stand in front of the class while other members of the class chant the name of those standing to the accompaniment of a steady crotchet beats hand clapping. In conducting this exercise, the teacher has in one way introduce the pupils to a communal form of music making, while at the same time encouraging the

internalization of the contextual music concept being taught.

The Musical Staff Poem



To teach the letters of the music alphabet and their significance in music study, the teacher may use another technique of choreo-poetry such as the following:

A B C D E F G
Form the music alphabet
They are used for lines and spaces
Also notes of instruments
When you know these alphabets
Music will be quite easy.

THE MUSICAL ALPHABET RAP



The foregoing lines can also be sung to the tune of 'twinkle, twinkle little star' which is a song that is widely known in lower elementary schools.

THE MUSICAL ALPHABET RAP



To teach the number of quaver notes which makes a crotchet beat, the teacher should use a song or poetry which can be performed to multiple quavers that can be made to crotchet beats such as **FAKA, FIKI (The 'Rhythm' Poem)**



*Mo le gun'ke, mo le so
Oke't'alajapa o le gun,
Mo le gun, mo le so
Faka fiki, fakafiki, Fo-o-o-o!!*

Here is the translation of the foregoing poem:



Fo-o-o-o!!

The above Yoruba poetry describes the sound of the train's wheels as they move across the rail which sets up a constant rhythm to beat the time into measures. Half of the class can first clap the rhythms of the musical notes in this poem, while the other half taps the regular crotchet beats which serve as the pulse of the poem with one foot. After this exercise, the teacher may select different groups of pupils to move around the class like a train while their classmates recite the poem and use their self-made musical instruments to provide simple rhythmic accompaniments.

*Apart from the above demonstrated examples, music teachers should also endeavour to make use of their ingenuity and compose similar choreo-poetical poems that will help achieve their objectives. It should be noted that such compositions should not be too long and immemorable, so as to enable pupils assimilate the intended instructions without stress. In addition, such compositions intended for music instruction could be an adaptation of an existing common song, such as demonstrated in the use of *Twinkle twinkle little star*. This will not only engender learners' interest, but will also help in reducing the amount of effort needed to cope with a given music instruction, in line with the activity-based or play-way method (Salami, 2006).*

Conclusion and Recommendation

Incorporating rhythm as a creative pedagogical tool in musical arts education for lower elementary school students holds immense potential for enriching musical learning experiences as it will make craving or longing for more musical knowledge and skills. By embracing rhythm as a fundamental element of music instruction, educators can foster students' musical understanding, creativity, and cognitive development. Through purposeful integration and innovative approaches, rhythm can serve as a catalyst for inspiring a lifelong appreciation for music within young learners, empowering

them to embrace the art of rhythm with enthusiasm and skill.

It is pertinent to state that the foregoing songs and poetry samples are just to serve as pointers to guide music teachers to create as many rhythm-based activities in their classroom. Such creative use of rhythm to teach music in Nigerian lower elementary schools should be encouraged as this will make music lessons, not only to be more interactive and practical oriented but will also help in inculcating different rhythmic patterns in the pupils. Given the foregoing, there is a need for effective teaching methods to sensitize or excite the rhythmic sense of students to fully understand the rubrics of the concept. Therefore, greater use of rhythm in the teaching of our musical knowledge in all Nigerian elementary schools is recommended.

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