

Music teaching and the process of enculturation: A cultural dilemma

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The history of music in Ghanaian school programmes can hardly be separated from the general history of education in Ghana. Since the time of colonial administration in Ghana, music (especially as manifested through singing) has formed part of the educational curriculum for different reasons, one being a tool for promoting the culture of the colonialists. Several advances (particularly after independence in Ghana) have been made to incorporate aspects of the Ghanaian culture into the educational curriculum. Over 50 years down the line, what is the extent to which Ghanaian (African) music is studied in Ghanaian schools? In this paper, the extent to which African music is taught in African (Ghanaian) universities is analysed by looking at the undergraduate music course content of two Ghanaian public universities. Although African music is taught, it only forms an infinitesimal proportion of the total music courses that are offered to music students in these two universities. Considering that the process of music education is also a process of enculturation, the concluding recommendation is that although a multicultural music programme is necessary, the teaching of African (Ghanaian) music in Ghanaian universities should be the dominant feature.

Introduction

For its exceptionally unique worth, music has, and continues to be part of the curriculum in every society where quality education is valued. Music systematically helps in the development of intelligence that affords ‘meaningful, cognitive experiences unavailable in any other way’ (Reimer, 2003, p. 28). According to Flohr and Hodges (2006), music activities draw on at least eight different forms of intelligence: music, visual-spatial, bodily kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, verbal-linguistic, spiritual intelligence and logical-mathematical intelligence. Other studies (e.g. Resnicow *et al.*, 2004; Otchere, 2013) have also found strong relationships between music and emotional intelligence. There is enough scientific evidence, therefore, to show that a commitment to the study of music is not just inherently pleasurable, but also has many benefits. The ‘near’ transfer theory (Hetland, 2000) which posits that through the study of music, other forms of intelligence are consciously or unconsciously developed is built on the findings that bear on the relationship between the study of music and the development of multiple cognitive abilities.

As self-fulfilling as the above relevance of music appears to be, there is even more to its study in relation to, among other things, the social life of the individual. Scholars (e.g. Kofie, 1994; Elliot, 1995; Kelly, 2002; Thompson & Schellenberg, 2006) generally agree on the fact that through the teaching of music, social and cultural norms are transmitted. In the words of Kelly (2002), 'music education also plays a role in the enculturation process by using music to transmit cultural values, skills, and traditions. Thus, music education is a fundamental social component of education that is vital to the continuity of each culture' (p. 40). As to exactly how music doubles up as an academic subject of intellectual merit and as an important acculturative tool, Thompson and Schellenberg (2006) explain that 'through passive or active exposure, listeners internalise regularities in the music of their own culture, forming long-term knowledge schemata into which novel music stimuli are assimilated' (p. 75). An important point of note in this explanation is that the music that is prevalent within the cultural setting of the learner provides the necessary basis and template for assessing and accepting other forms of music outside the cultural setting. Without a firm grounding in the native sounds of the learner, therefore, an important component of what they should achieve through education in music is missing.

The Ghanaian situation

Music education in Ghana has largely underestimated the relevance of incorporating the rich indigenous musical culture into the formal music programmes at all levels of education. The nature of music that is highlighted in the formal educational setting has been predominantly euro-centric. This is because the Europeans who started formal education in Ghana came with their own musical package and had very little or no regard for the existing indigenous musical traditions. Whereas mission schools emphasised the singing of hymns, castle schools stressed the singing of Western (particularly British) patriotic songs (see Flolu & Amuah, 2003) which had very little or perhaps no meaning at all to African students in these schools. Kofie (1994) provides a picturesque happenstance of an African school teacher who insists on teaching first-grade pupils foreign songs without reflecting upon the long-term effect. He writes:

First, the poor child has to undergo an ordeal of accommodating the new scale system if it is different from what it hears daily in its environment outside the walls of the school. Next, follow the unsuitable rhythms which are equally foreign to the child, and finally come the texts of such foreign songs which have to be learned at all costs. The end result of the destructive element of the fundamental stages of an imposed system of music education is that the child grows into an adult neither knowing its culture well nor accepting completely, the imposed one. Only the analytical adult can reintegrate himself into his culture rather than be a stranger in two worlds. (p. 100)

In the description above, Kofie (1994) makes clear the potential undesirable effect of a music education programme that is built on music which is foreign to the learner. Unfortunately, this practice has not changed much. After over fifty years of independence from colonial rule and after many educational reforms, the use of western musical examples still dominates the music curricular of Ghanaian schools at all levels. The Curriculum

Enrichment Program of the 1987 educational reform in Ghana proposed by the Dzobo committee was an attempt to address this paucity by consciously introducing many aspects of Ghanaian culture into the educational circle. Unfortunately, this gallant attempt was short-lived.

Foreign music in the light of indigenous culture

Gregory (2004) observes that 'most studies on the psychology of music are set within the context of Western musical and cultural traditions. However, in many other cultures both the style of the music and its role in society are quite different' (p. 123). With a clear understanding that the teaching of music carries with it the impartation of culture, it goes without saying that the emphasis of Western music in non-Western cultures leads to the neglect of the rich traditions inherent in such cultures. According to Scholes (1970; cited in Otchere, 2013), 'music . . . is in a considerable degree a personal and social reflection, so that for its full understanding, a knowledge of biography and history is also demanded' (p. 47). Scholes supports the fact that, the study of a particular music, in itself cannot be complete without an understanding of the cultural setting from which it hails. This is the extent to which music teaching becomes a cultural thing. Otchere (2013) opines that 'performing music from any culture is another effective way of learning about the culture as a whole' (p. 41). As an apotheosis to this, Simonton (2004) gives the following scenario:

Anyone well versed in the European music tradition must have some acquaintance with such compositions as the *Missa Papae Marcelli*, the *Brandenburg Concerti*, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *La Mer*, *Das Lied von der Erde*, and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Such persons would also show some familiarity with the composers responsible for these masterpieces: Palestrina, Bach, Mozart, Wagner, Mahler, Debussy, and Stravinsky. And, finally, these well-educated individuals will have some awareness of the musical periods in which these composers conceived their works, whether Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Post-Romantic, Impressionist, or Modern eras. (p. 107)

In effect, learning about a piece of music also means learning about the composer and about the culture within which these songs were composed. For example, an understanding of Handel's 'water music' requires knowledge of the history of Great Britain between the years 1714 and 1717 when George I was king. The problem with emphasising Western (normally art music) in non-Western cultures; particularly in African cultures lies with the functional use of the music. The Western art music is mostly used for concerts and normally targets an 'enlightened' audience. However, in many other non-Western cultures, music is not a separable, independent art form to be enjoyed for its own sake, but as a core constituent of the activities within the culture. This finds justification in Gregory (2004) who notes that 'music may accompany every human activity from the cradle to the grave, including lullabies, games, dancing, work, healing, battle, rites and ceremonies, including weddings and funerals. The style of this music is frequently very different from that of Western music' (p. 124). Commenting on style, Bebey (1975; cited in Gregory, 2004) describes the traditional music of black Africa: 'African musicians do not seek to combine

Table 1. *Proportion of African music in University A.*

Level	Courses offered	Number of courses in African music
100	4 core courses	None specifically focuses on African music
200	8 core courses	None specifically focuses on African music
300	6 core courses 11 electives	2 core courses have a focus on African music 2 electives have a focus on African music
400	6 core courses 9 electives	1 core course has a focus on African music 2 electives have a focus on African music
Total	44 courses	7 have a focus on African music

sounds in a manner pleasing to the ear. Their aim is simply to express life in all its aspects through the medium of sound.' He also stresses 'that to understand African music it must be studied within the context of traditional African life' (p. 124). Thus, the need to emphasise the study of African music in African schools cannot be overemphasised.

African music in Ghanaian universities

Flolu and Amuah (2003) maintain that 'the perpetuation and development of indigenous African music is, to a greater extent, the responsibility of the educational system' (p. 113). What this means is that, unless African music is given a central place in the educational system, its relevance and development will not be fully realised. The universities must constitute the starting point of curriculumising African music. This is because many people who study music in Ghanaian universities end up as teachers in one way or the other. A look at the career opportunities listed for the study of music under the music section of the African Studies Institute supports this claim (music teacher, college tutor, private music instructor). The fact also remains that it is what teachers learn in the course of their training that they are most comfortable with in teaching. Therefore, if the teachers who study music in the university receive strong training in African music, they, in turn, will go out and propagate such knowledge to the learners in the lower levels of the educational ladder and by so doing, improve the regard for African music and its associated culture.

For the purpose of writing this paper, the course content of the undergraduate music program of two public universities in Ghana was closely analysed to find out the extent to which African music is studied. This was done by looking at the course titles and course descriptions for all the undergraduate music courses in the two universities. The findings are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 and are subsequently discussed. For ethical reasons, the universities are labelled A and B.

The summary provided in Table 1 shows that in the first university, only 15.9% (7 out of 44) of the total undergraduate course content has a sole focus on studying African music. The courses for each level are spread out between first and second semesters. Out of the proportion of courses which have a focus on African music however, only 6.8% (three out of 44) is obligatory for all music students (core subjects). It is worthy of note also, that the

Table 2. *Proportion of African music in University B.*

Level	Courses offered	Number of courses in African music
100	4 core courses	2 with a focus on African music
200	4 core courses	None specifically focuses on African music
300	4 core courses 12 electives	1 core course has a focus on African music 3 electives have a focus on African music
400	4 core courses 14 electives	2 core courses have a focus on African music 4 electives have a focus on African music
Total	42 courses	12 have a focus on African music

African music courses begin in level 300; implying that other students who drop music after the first or second year of study have no specific courses in African music.

In University B, the proportion of courses that have a focus on African music is comparatively higher. The summary in Table 2 shows that 28.6% (12 out of 42) of the courses have a specific focus on African music. Out of this proportion, 11.9% (five out of 42) is obligatory for all music students (core subjects). In this university however, students who drop music after their first or second years would still have had the opportunity to study some African music.

A closer look at the proportions of African music studied in these two African (Ghanaian) universities shows that African music courses constitute far less than 50% of the undergraduate music programmes in both universities (not even up to 30%). Fitting these observations in the light of the earlier discussions on music and enculturation, it is clear how much Western culture (music) is hyped over that of Africa.

Discussion

The dominance of Western music in Ghanaian curricula after 50 years of independence is indeed something to reckon with. It is not bad per se to study Western music; far from that. But it is crucial to consider the effect of such training on the graduates who pass through these programmes. By the time people get to the university, they would have developed their own musical preferences from the quantities of music that they are exposed to in their environment. The predominant music in the Ghanaian environment is certainly not Western classical music. There is a rich tapestry of musical variety in the Ghanaian environment from which people develop their preferences and tastes. Abeles *et al.* (1995) assert that:

tastes and preferences are established in a culture or subculture, they are non-rational in the sense that their rightness or quality cannot be demonstrated in a rational, scientific sense. The Latin proverb *De gustibus non disputandum est* ('There is no disputing tastes') is true; there is no use arguing about preferences. They exist for a particular group of people at a particular time and place. (p. 136)

What these authors are saying in the above citation is that each culture has unique musical traditions which are valid in their own right. Education in each culture must focus on

developing these rather than that of others for which immediate references cannot be found in the day-to-day lived experiences of the people within the specified environment. If students are made to shelve their preferences and concentrate on western music in the universities, they tend to use Western art music as the yardstick for measuring all forms of music. Many people who go through Ghanaian university music programmes develop a strong liking for classical music and so tend to compose in, and develop these styles rather than the dominant styles of the prevailing environment. How will African music ever get developed to its full capability if the interest of those who have the ability to cause such a developmental change have been swayed through their education?

Conclusion

It is definitely important to know about many other cultures, and I think music education should provide palpable grounds for such an exposure. However, the teaching of African music in African schools should have dominance over the music of other cultures. Many Ghanaian music graduates who find themselves teaching in Western countries have to teach African music; simply because there is no way they can teach Western music better than the Westerners themselves. How are they expected to be fully successful if their own training does not help them? Elliot (1995) identifies the importance of multicultural music education programmes by noting that 'music education should be multicultural in nature. No one musical practice is inherently more valuable or worthy than another musical practice' (p. 233). Notwithstanding this multiculturalism, he goes ahead to clearly point out that: 'music curricula should be reflective of music practice. Curricula are both means and ends ...' (p. 258).

To this extent, I agree with Elliot that although music education must provide a basis for learning about other cultures, its main focus should be on the prevailing culture within which such an education is being carried out. This is because music teaching is a means of enculturation. Kofie (1994) concludes that 'no other discipline can compare favourably with music in fostering a child's character and mental development' (p. 102).

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