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Lost in the Mix: A (Hi)story of Music in Ghanaian Basic Education

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Abstract



In Ghana, music as a formal subject of study occupies the periphery of the curriculum. While a number of reasons account for this, the article highlights the one which has eluded the radar as far as Ghanaian music education scholarship is concerned. This reason is that music has not been given adequate exposure in terms of official policy on education in Ghana, to prove its worth. Based on the mere exposure theory, the article reviewed the major provisions for various educational reforms/ordinances passed for basic schools in Ghana from 1852 to 2007 and focused on the place of music in each of them. The study revealed that since 1852 (when the first educational ordinance was passed under a colonial government in the then Gold Coast) up to 1959, there was no official policy on music education in the basic school curriculum in Ghana. Music was introduced in 1987 as part of the Cultural Studies Syllabus. It was made to stand on its own as a subject

in 1994, but the syllabus for the programme was not ready until 1998. Nine years after in the introduction of this syllabus however, music lost the status of being a single subject in the basic schools as it was made a part of the horizontal interdisciplinary integrated curriculum of Creative Arts.

Keywords: basic school, curriculum, Ghana, music education, review

Introduction

Basic school education in Ghana refers to the nine years of schooling that fall between kindergarten and Senior High School. It comprises of six years of primary and three years of Junior High School. At the basic school level, all students study the same subjects without any specialisations. The purpose is to give all students the necessary grounding, as well as some strong universal fundamental knowledge before they embark on subject specialisation in the Senior High Schools. The subjects on the basic school timetable include Mathematics, Integrated Science, English language, Ghanaian Language, Citizenship Education and Creative Arts. When one compares the status of music to the other subjects on the basic school timetable, there is an obvious lopsidedness in favour of these other subjects in terms of number of periods per week, attention and prestige. This status of music, as a formal subject of study, has been the case in Ghana since the very inceptions of formal education in the country. Flolu and Amuah (2003) assert that, "the history of music education in Ghana is not that of achievements, and changes; rather it is a history of difficulties, a history of missing links between school education and the local cultural environment, a history of the struggle for cultural identity and cultural preservation" (p. 1). These authors highlight the fact that music education in Ghana has, indeed, faced (and continues to face) many challenges. It appears, however, that music as a subject of study faces the threat of extinction in many other countries as well. According to Reimer (1989, p.214),

every field in education is obligated to explain its values to itself and to others and to have a plan for how those values can be gained through schooling. But there is a special character to the need for the field of music education to do so, because of its status, throughout the world, on the fringe of the education enterprise.

Reimer sets the tone for this discussion by identifying the status of music education (on the fringe of the educational enterprise) throughout the world. The basic educational system in Ghana, exhibits one of the highest manifestations of this 'fringe' status of music in the curriculum. Thus, Flolu and Amuah (2003, p.1) note, "of all the subjects in

the school curriculum music has received the least attention.”

Different scholars that attempt an explanation to this situation have identified a number of reasons. For example, the scarcity of equipment and materials such as musical instruments, phonographs and recordings, library books on music and film strips (Ofei, 1977). Also, inadequate trained teachers to handle the teaching of music in all first and second cycle schools and colleges (Otchere, 2013). Furthermore, problems of the Ministry of Education with respect to the handling of music education matters (Evans, 1975; Akrofi, 1987). Again, ill attitudes of some students towards music (Kofie, 1995) and so on. In this article, I do not seek to belabor the foregoing reasons, but to bring to the fore one major area of concern as a sequel to the aforementioned, which has contributed to the said status of music education in Ghana. This area of concern is that Music has not been given a chance (as far as official educational policy is concerned in Ghana) to prove its worth in the basic school curriculum.

Educational planners over the years and curriculum developers in Ghana have not supported the plight of music education as far as official provision and educational policy is concerned. Since the first official policy on education was passed in Ghana in 1852, many other innovations have been made in Ghana’s educational system, which have resulted in a number of educational reforms. Each of these reforms is actually meant to be an improvement of a previous one. According to Kelly (1989), “the recognition of a need for change implies an awareness of inadequacies in existent practices and thus of the need for some basis upon which both those practices and innovations which may be introduced to replace them can be evaluated” (p. 187). Such a basis can be arrived at, if a meticulous evaluation of any reform is done before a new one is introduced. Thus, Kelly (1989, p.186) again maintains that “instructional decisions are more likely to be sound when they are based on information that is accurate, relevant, and comprehensive.” In support of this idea of basing educational reform on a strong information base, Boyle and Radocy (1987) aver that, “not only do instructional and curricular decisions affect individuals, but they also affect broad school, community, and societal goals for music education. It is therefore imperative that such decisions be made from a strong information base” (p. 14). The need for a thorough assessment of existing reforms before a new one is introduced can thus not be overemphasised. The question remains whether such a strong information base informed each the numerous educational reforms in Ghana. Kelly (1989, p. 186), concludes that “it is certainly the case that many major curriculum innovations have not been accompanied by any attempt at evaluation.”

My purpose in this article is to provide a vivid information base upon which educational policies on music education in Ghana can be pitched. It reviews the various educational ordinances in Ghana since 1852 (when the first educational ordinance was passed); paying particular attention to the place of music in each of these ordinances. I also examine the extent to which these ordinances have contributed to the status of music education in the 2007 educational reform. The following questions are addressed in this study:

- a) What is the general status of music education in the basic educational ordinances between 1852 and 2007?
- b) Which policies have directly impacted music education in Ghana's basic schools?
- c) To what extent has official provision (educational ordinances) contributed to the present state of music education in Ghana?

Theoretical Framework

Establishing a study in the wider context of a working theory carries with it a number of advantages. It gives focus and direction as well as increases construct and cumulative validation in the study. It helps in formulating questions that will guide the study and provide a good basis for interpreting the findings in the research. This study, therefore, proceeds under the aegis of the time-tested *mere exposure theory* (Zajonc, 1968; Sawyer, 1981; Miller, 1976; Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980). The theory provides a reliable framework within which the confines of this study were set. The main proposition of the theory is that the more exposure we have to a stimulus, the more we become familiar and the more we will tend to like it. The mere exposure theory finds support in the *social judgment theory* (Sherif & Sherif, 1967) and the *anchoring and adjustment heuristic theory* (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973) which both subscribe to the view that, in any decision making process, a familiar stimulus is most likely to be chosen (as an anchor) over an unfamiliar one. That we tend to base estimates and decisions on known 'anchors' or familiar positions, with an adjustment relative to this start point. Thus, we are better at relative thinking than absolute thinking (Kahneman & Tversky, 1973). These theories, together, explain why music has the fringe status described in the introductory section of this paper. Music as a formal subject of study has not been given adequate exposure in policy to enable it breed the taste that it has to among Ghanaians and the world over as described by Reimer (1989). This is because policy makers have always been 'anchored' by the subjects that have existed (familiar) before the review is done (relative thinking). Even where music is introduced into the curriculum, it faces the

threat of being cut out if there is the need to reduce the subjects on the curriculum for any reason. This is what Brophy (1994, p. 30) implies when he asserts that “historically, the first programmes to be reduced or cut in the elementary school are those in the arts, under the assumption that the classroom teacher can ‘teach music’ or ‘do art.’” By this, Brophy attests to the aforementioned point that music (the arts) does not last long enough to yield the desirable results by which people can be convinced of the immense wealth therein. According to Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1995, p.278), “every child should have a general, broad musical experience before embarking on his or her choice of specialized activities. Without it, most students would not be able to make intelligent choices.” From this standpoint, it is clear that many Ghanaian children do not have the opportunity to make ‘intelligent choices’ because they are denied of the formal musical experience they require before they embark on choosing their special areas of concentration.

The attempt at informing policy makers on the value of music in education is one of the latent intentions of this paper. The need for the study is justified to the extent that, the official non-provision for music in the curriculum, as well the non-utilisation of research findings in music has not been stressed. The inclusion of mathematics, English and other subjects in the basic school curriculum can also be explained by the theory; these subjects have had the exposure needed. They have been tested and retested so as to be modified to meet current trends and thus, will for a long time remain on the time table since they are ‘very familiar’. The same cannot be said about music. This article, therefore, highlights the peripheral position given to music in the various educational ordinances and reviews for basic education in Ghana from 1852 to 2007 as the main reason for the present status of music education in Ghana.

Methodology

The analytical research method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) which combines historical and descriptive content analysis (Sarantakos, 2005) approaches is employed in this study. Aboagye (1997, p.3) explains that “the study of the history of education unquestionably throws some light on a nation’s contemporary educational problems since there are hardly any new problems in education at all.” Phelps (1975, p.86) also adds that “the quest for information to complete a missing link or bring solidarity to the figurative chain of knowledge about music is a ... reason for the researcher in music education to undertake historical research.” The exact steps employed in this study were a) the gathering of data b) the criticism of data c) presentation of facts d) interpretations, and conclusions in readable form. Accordingly, the data gathered in this study was documentation of the various educational reforms that were reviewed. The second step involved the holistic discussion of the reforms. The third step presented the

main tenets outlined in each of the reforms, highlighting the subjects that were stressed or introduced in each of the reforms. The next step then focused on the place of music in each of the reforms. Conclusions were then made for each of the reforms reviewed. The main tenets in all the major ordinances that were reviewed were discussed and the place of music was clearly pointed out in each of them.

Results and Discussion

Brief history of Music Education in Ghana

Music in Ghanaian school settings, though non-centralised and informal, existed strongly during the time of colonial administration by the British, to satisfy an ambitious need of the missionaries (in their bid to propagate their missionary activities) and to enculturate their colonised (Otchere, 2015). The history of music education in Ghana has received considerable attention in Flolu and Amuah (2003). They attribute the beginnings of music education to the need, which arose for teachers and more church workers. It became important for the indigenous converts to sing hymns and participate in other church activities for the expansion of the church. Thus, music was introduced into the school curriculum. The fact that this provision was not visible in any of the ordinances before 1987 indicates that it was only part of the covert and unofficial curriculum. This explains why there were no written records of exact dates and nature of music lessons in these mission schools. It is only lateral evidence that indicates the inclusion of singing (in a manner similar to existing practice in Europe).

The immediate purpose of music education in the colonial period was to train people to teach simple hymns and songs to the various church choirs, which had begun to emerge. Rudiments and theory of music was later added to help teach the imported Western instruments such as the harmonium, organ and piano. As the choirs also grew, they thirsted for songs of higher complexity and thus, lessons in counterpoint began in music education. Because there was no planned common music curriculum (up to the middle of the 20th Century), teaching of music was left to the initiative of individual teachers and thus, varied from school to school. Music studies were based on that of England; the syllabus of the Royal Schools of Music in Britain gave guidelines for teachers in teacher training institutions while those in Grammar Schools used Cambridge and London GCE exams. Music education was just a part of the church. In 1949, Dr. Ephraim Amu (the father of Ghanaian art music composition) became the first Ghanaian head teacher of the three-year teacher education programme at Achimota (a model school which was established under a colonial governor, Sir Gordon Guggisberg). Although the teacher training programme during Amu's time as head included music, the examination was based on the syllabuses of the Associated Board of the Royal

Schools of Music (ABRSM) in Britain. It was not until 1959 that the Ghanaian Ministry of Education published the first music syllabus for the teaching of music in schools. This syllabus served as the manual for formal music training in Ghanaian basic schools until it was reviewed in 1999.

Educational Ordinances in Ghana

In the subsequent paragraphs, the article gives an overview of the major ordinances and educational reforms for basic schools that have taken place within formal education in Ghana and the place of music in each of these ordinances. Unless otherwise duly acknowledged and indicated, the major source of all the ordinances that have been summarised and reviewed below, particularly between 1852 until 1987, is sourced from Aboagye (1997).

Ghana's contact with Western Europe began in 1471 with the arrival of the Portuguese. In spite of the early contact with the Europeans, any serious considerations of formal education were to begin over three-hundred years later; thus, it was not until 1852 that the first official educational ordinance was passed in Ghana (Aboagye, 1997). This ordinance of 1852 was passed under Commander Stephen Hill. Its motive was to provide better education among the inhabitants of the Queen's colonies. There was no specific provision for music education in this ordinance. Music was not mentioned as one of the subjects to be included in the basic school curriculum. Technical education as well as girl's education was the point of focus in the 1852 ordinance.

In 1882, the second educational ordinance was passed. This ordinance was passed for both the Gold Coast and Lagos during the time of Sir Rowe and Lord Kimberly. It aimed at establishing a uniform education. The subjects in the curriculum included English Grammar, arithmetic and religion. History, Geography and Needlework were also included for girls. In this ordinance, like the former, there was no provision for music education. Music was not mentioned as one of the subjects to be studied in the basic schools. It is significant to note that, even though the Christian missions (whose activities involved a lot of music and singing) were brought on board, there were no considerations of including music as a formal subject of study.

The next educational ordinance was passed five years later in 1887. Unlike that of 1882, this one was passed for the Gold Coast alone under Sir Brandford Griffith. The provisions of this ordinance mandated the expansion of the curriculum to include technical, vocational and agricultural education. Again, there was no provision for music education in this ordinance. A committee set up by Governor Rodger reviewed this 1887 reform in 1908. The review only strengthened technical as well as teacher education. Nothing was said about the inclusion of music in the subjects to be studied.

In 1925, another ordinance was passed under Brigadier-General Sir Gordon Guggisberg. During the World War I (1914 -1918), education in Ghana was really threatened with the defeat of the Germans in Togoland, which led to the departure of the Bremen and Basel missions in 1916 and 1917 respectively. In the words of Aboagye (1997, p.22), "the departure of the two missions had a disastrous effect on educational development in this country." Therefore, when Guggisberg came to power in 1919, he had a lot of responsibility as far as improving the quality of education in the country was concerned. Three major educational committees informed Guggisberg's educational ordinance, namely: a) the Educationists' Committee – 1920, b) the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, c) the Phelps-Stokes Commission. Upon the recommendations and suggestions of these committees, Guggisberg came out with 16 very influential principles for education in Ghana. This was the last educational ordinance that was passed under a colonial government. As detailed and as all-embracing as the ordinance was, there was no explicit provision for formal music education in Ghana. A critical look at the seventh and eighth principles (moral training and religious education) would lead one to think that music could be embedded somewhere in the curriculum in line with Platonian and Aristotelian philosophies that music helps in the character training of children. This was however, not the case at all. It is quite important to note that, it was during the time of Guggisberg that Achimota College (based on the recommendation of the 1920 Educationists' Committee) was set up; and eventually, music was introduced with the invitation of Dr. Ephraim Amu. The music however, was not a core part of the curriculum. Aboagye (1997, p.49) states: "tribal [ethnic] drumming and dancing which were initially frowned upon by the missionaries were held each month at the time of the full moon." This, together with the introduction of timetable hobbies, was meant to reduce the boorishness and irrelevance of education prevalent in the Gold Coast.

Between 1937 and 1941, an educational committee was set up. This educational committee was set up during the World War II (1939 – 45) to overhaul the country's educational system and to make recommendations for improvement. Two leading Ghanaian citizens (Nana Sir Ofori Atta I & Sir Arku Korsah) were part of this committee. Although the committee's report was ready by 1941, its implementation had to be after the war. The main tenets of the committee included: making education child centered, providing a congenial atmosphere for pupils to learn, improving the quality of teachers and making education relevant to the society. The committee proposed the introduction of a two-year course leading to a Teacher's Certificate 'B' to complement the then-existing four-year course leading to a Certificate A. Here, again, there was no mention of the inclusion of music in the basic school curriculum.

The years 1957 to 1966 witnessed the Nkrumah era. Ghana had gained independence from the British and Dr. Kwame Nkrumah had become the first president of Ghana. During his turn, he thought education to be the panacea for all the problems facing the Gold Coast (what Ghana was called before independence); some of which included: high illiteracy rate, unemployment, diseases, litigation, conflicts and poverty. Thus he launched the programme called Accelerated Development Programme (ADP) for Education. This led to quantitative expansion in both number of schools and number of students enrolled. Resources were also reserved for further education. Although not captured in any official ordinance, a new (perhaps the first) syllabus for music was introduced for basic schools in 1959. The syllabus emphasised singing (of hymns and patriotic songs) and aspects of music theory and composition (Flolu & Amuah, 2003).

In 1961, an educational act was passed under the Nkrumah government. This act made basic education free and compulsory. All schools were placed under local authorities and no child was to be forced into any religious indoctrination. As far as the subjects in the basic school curriculum were concerned, the 1961 act did not make any modifications; music still had no place on the official timetable. The music syllabus that had been drawn in 1959 was only used in schools where there were people who could teach some of the topics. It was not compulsory for all schools. This is because teacher training programmes at that time did not train teachers who could handle that syllabus. The first syllabus for the teaching of music was introduced in the teacher training colleges only in 1975 (Flolu & Amuah, 2003).

Soon after independence from 1960/61 to 1974/75, as many as nine educational committees were appointed one after the other to conduct comprehensive reviews of the educational system in the country. These Educational Committees were: Botsio Committee (1960 - 1961), Amissah Committee (1963), Kwapong Committee (1966 - 1967), Cockerft Committee (1966), Busia Committee (1967), Russel Committee (1969), Dowuona Committee (1970), Dzobo Committee (1972) and Evans Anfom Committee (1974-75). The successive appointment of educational committees implied that, the government(s) were aware of some shortfalls from the educational system which had been carried over from the colonial administration, and which they wanted to rectify.

After the coup d'état of 1966, most of the ideas of the Convention People's Party (CPP) Government came to a halt. The National Liberation Council (NLC) came into power under General Ankrah. He constituted an Educational Review Committee led by Prof. Kwapong. The major concern for this review was that the educational system was too bookish and irrelevant to the needs of the country. Schooling was too theory based and graduates were non-functional. This prompted the introduction of continuation

schools – to ensure that practical skills were taught along geographical occupation lines. Again, this educational review only led to the introduction of craft and origami, carpentry and masonry in the curriculum. Music education was given no place at all.

A second coup d'état led to the displacement of the Busia government by Colonel Acheampong in 1972. Under his National Redemption Council (NRC), he set up the Dzobo committee to review the Educational system. In 1973/74, the government approved a new structure and content of education for the country. This was based mostly on the Dzobo Education Committee's report of 1972. The main innovation was how the curriculum had been vocationalised and the establishment of Junior Secondary Schools. The committee gave recommendations for streamlining the number of years for basic education: 24-months pre-school training, nine years of basic education (six years primary and three years Junior secondary) before proceeding to Senior Secondary. The committee also stressed the need to include practical-oriented subjects, which would make schooling relevant to society. In spite of all these, there was no mention of Music education at all. None of the committees mentioned earlier suggested the inclusion of music education in the curriculum. The implementation of the new structure and content of education began in 1974/75, however, it was on experimental basis. The provisions here actually started operating in 1987. Thus, since 1852 when the first educational act was passed in Ghana up to the New Structure and Content of education in 1987 (a period of 135 years of education in Ghana), there was no official provision for formal music training in Ghanaian basic schools.

The Curriculum Enrichment Programme (CEP)

In 1987, the government set out to find ways of incorporating the indigenous Ghanaian culture into the educational system. According to Flolu and Amuah (2003), four main goals were set up in the CEP; to enable school and college goers to grow to a) be proud of their country, b) appreciate and value our culture, c) feel the need to serve others and contribute towards the improvement of their environment, and d) be healthy and strong. According to CEP, the use of indigenous drums (particularly the 'talking drums') were to replace the bells that were used in schools and colleges, to summon the school community to assembly, to classes, to dining halls and to change lessons. Furthermore, the recommendations of both the CEP and the Report by the educational Review Commission on Basic Education influenced subsequent curriculum innovations and led to the introduction of the Cultural studies programme in 1987 for Primary and JSS and in 1988 for Teacher Training Colleges. Music, Dance, Folklore and Religious Knowledge were regarded as basic components of the Ghanaian culture. From the discussions in this paper so far, this is the first time mention is made of an official attempt towards music education in the Ghanaian educational system. Flolu and Amuah (2003, p. 17)

affirm that “for the first time, since the introduction of formal education in Ghana, fifteen-year old pupils now took School Leaving Examinations in music.”

It was not until 1994, however, when the Educational Reforms Review Committee proposed a provision for Music and Dance, as a standalone subject, on the school’s timetable to replace the Cultural Studies Programme. The report recommended that Music and Dance (together as a single subject) was not to be examined by any external examining board; it was to be assessed only internally. A panel was set up in 1997 to draft a syllabus for the new Music and Dance programme. Music and Dance (as a subject on its own) thus appeared on the timetable since then until 2007. In the 2007 Educational reforms in Ghana, Music and Dance lost the status as a single separate subject at the Basic level and has since been catalogued in a horizontal multidisciplinary integrated curriculum tagged ‘Creative Arts’ which involves music, painting and sewing.

Conclusions

Thus far, through the chronology of educational ordinances reviewed and the history of music education in Ghana, it is very clear that music education indeed has only been an appendage to other subjects in the curriculum. This is evident in the facts that follow. Firstly, there was no official provision for music education in basic schools until the introduction of the Curriculum Enrichment Programme (CEP) and the subsequent Cultural Studies subject in 1987. Secondly, even though music education existed and was run side by side with other subjects, it was unofficial and rather covert. Thirdly, the music education programme had no uniform principle or philosophy on which it was built. Furthermore, music education, even after 1987 was only seen as a way of bringing culture to the fore and not for its own sake. This attempt had been made around 1927 when Amu was first appointed to the Prince of Wales College in Achimota. Kwegyir Aggrey, in his bid to press home his philosophy of the unification of blacks and whites and having won the support of the government (Guggisberg) thought music as one of the powerful avenues for achieving this aim. Thus, once again, music was promoted not for its own sake but for the fulfillment of a different desired purpose. Also, when Music and Dance was introduced as a subject on the curriculum, it was to be unexamined externally. As to whether this decision was good or not, the point here is that music did not get the same status as the other subjects. The worst part of it is that, it has lost that prestige again since the 2007 educational review in Ghana where music is only a smaller part to the bigger integrative subject of Creative Arts. Viewing all these conclusions in the light of the *mere exposure theory*, it is clear that music has indeed been underexposed in the educational curriculum in Ghana and this has undoubtedly accounted for the fringe status of music education.

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