



## THE NATURE OF GHANAIAN MUSIC AND DANCE SYLLABUS AND THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ITS CONTENTS IN TAMALE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examined the nature of the Junior High School (JHS) music and dance syllabus in the context of growing cultural education and current socio-cultural transitions in Ghana. It also sought to highlight the challenges of teaching the syllabus in the schools. The design used was a case study while archival document analysis and interview incorporated the data collection instruments to collect the appropriate data to answer the research questions. The content of the syllabus was analyzed while two main participants of the study were also interviewed. The study reveals a mismatch in the relationship between the content of the music and dance taught in the classroom and what actually exists in the syllabus to be taught. It is recommended that music teachers properly align their instructional content to the syllabus since it contains enough African music content that can prepare the pupils to appreciate their musical culture.*

**KEYWORDS:** Syllabus, Tamale, International School, Culture, JHS



## INTRODUCTION

It is generally known that the teaching of music and dance in the basic schools in Ghana has suffered some pedagogical and implementation challenges for a long time. This problem is partly historical and partly political. It has always been very difficult to bring music into the formal sector from the traditional sector. In terms of the content of the syllabus, what percentage of African music is involved as against the Western music content? For Nketia (1999), there are usually problems of implementation of the syllabus:

what kind of orientation must the teacher develop to enable him or her to approach traditional music in their own terms? Again, what aspect of the traditional learning process can be shortened in the classroom context for the materials of music to be presented and acquired more systematically than it is done in traditional communities? What should teachers do in order not to find themselves floundering or devoting the time allocated to music for singing or singing and dancing? (p.43)

Nketia was of the view that the problems associated with the teaching and learning of music and dance were due to interruption of the Western education on the learning of traditional music coupled with activities of churches as well as economic and social changes that took place in Africa during the colonial era. Other issues are also about the nature of the music and dance syllabus as it exists in its current form. The reason is that many scholars have been talking about the teaching of African music in the schools but it is the syllabus that determines the content to be taught. Again, the challenges involved in teaching the content are also significant. The extent of the African music content in the syllabus and its challenges of teaching are not known.

It is worth noting that music is used for a number of purposes in Ghana. In traditional as well as contemporary Ghanaian society, no occasion is complete without the use of music. Music and dance permeate the cultural life of the individual and community. Amuah and Adum-Attah (2010) opined that music and dance are used during initiation ceremonies. There is special music and dance for puberty rites like *dipo* of the Krobo. They further indicated that music and dance are used to enhance religious worship by making it interesting and a means of attracting people to the worship centers. To add, music and dance helps people to express themselves emotionally and also used as moral education for the youth. This helps in controlling the social behaviour of people in the community (Amoah & Adum-Attah, 2010). The music and dance curriculum should therefore serve these purposes so that the pupils being nurtured will fit well in their communities. A preliminary study conducted in Tamale International School in the Sagnarigu district of Ghana revealed that singing hymns and some gospel songs dominated the teaching of music by the teachers. The question then arises, do the teachers have the syllabus for the subject? If available, do they use it at all? Is it only hymns and gospel songs the syllabus recommends? It is becoming uncertain, the content in the syllabus. There was the need to analyze to ascertain its contents for use. This paper, therefore, takes a cursory look at the Music and Dance syllabus and examines the challenges of teaching music and dance in Tamale International School. It is hoped that Ghanaian children, and by extension Africans, need to cherish their own and this can be achieved by studying, enjoying, and performing their music. The African music content of the syllabus is significant to help the pupils to learn and transmit their culture as Africans and uphold their cultural heritage in their communities and the nation at large.



## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### *Ghanaian Music Curriculum*

There was no sudden increase in the use of African music in Primary and Secondary Schools immediately after independence; however, it seems that in schools the teaching of African music was encouraged. By 1974 an increasingly important place was being given to African in the curriculum of schools; in that same year, the New Structure tent of Education was published. The proposals were implemented (Akrofi, 1987), with some modifications. For example, in the year when Junior Secondary School (JSS) program was introduced, Music ceased to be an independent subject because it was integrated with Drama and Religious Knowledge as an integrated core subject called Cultural Studies (Addo, 1990). At the Senior Secondary School (SSS), a three-year programme began in January 1991, Religion, and Art were optional; Physical Education was a compulsory subject while Dance and Crafts became part of Cultural Studies. The new meaning to cultural studies could be seen as creating an inconsistency; for while African dancing is an integral part of African music at the lower level of education, it seemed to have been from music at the Senior Secondary School lower level.

The missionaries introduced Western hymns and tonic sol-fa sight-singing, which vindicated Curwen's methods but did nothing to preserve indigenous music (Kwami, 1994). Kwami is of the view that it is debatable what 'indigenous music' means: their 'traditional' music which is conceived and performed in sol-fa notation. Therefore, as it has been pointed out earlier, the missionary influence must not be seen as totally destructive. He accounted that there have been several developments since in the school music curriculum. According to him, in 1987, for example, the WASC was replaced with a West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC) School Certificate/General Certificate of Education O-level music examination. Unlike the former examination, which was based exclusively on the academic study of Western classical music, the latter included the study of African music, Western music and the music of people of African descent in the United States and the Caribbean. Other developments also influenced the use of African cultural materials especially African music in the classroom. The Curriculum Enrichment Program (CEP) was also initiated in 1985. Apart from community and physical education, the CEP also involved cultural education. The cultural education included African music, drama, folklore, and proverbs. The vocal composition was encouraged, and African drumming and dancing were taught. Traditional experts were consulted and schools were to fund the purchase of their own resources through community work.

Furthermore, dances from other areas were to be learned, and chiefs, as sources of information about traditional culture and knowledge, were approached when necessary. Eventually, African drums were to replace Western bells, and each institution was to have its own invented messages to summon pupils and students to assemblies and other gatherings. While Akrofi (1987) says, the basis of music education in Ghana is Western music and method, Oehrle (1991a) and other writers have identified 'an eclectic approach combining African and Western musical traditions and a 'bi-musical' approach (Oehrle, 1991a). Akrofi says that Western hymns and songs are learned by rote, as well as the rudiments and theory of Western music, but staff notation is often taught in a barren context, i.e. with very few examples (Oehrle, 1991b). In tertiary education, the emphasis placed on Western music generated a negative reaction in students because they did not experience it in their daily lives. African music features strongly in teacher education, with other non-Western (Japanese, Indian, and Chinese) musics, many



teachers are unable to teach African music, partly because of the negative reaction of secondary students; consequently, local musicians and methods were utilized.

### ***The Need for Music and Dance in Schools***

The introduction of formal education in Ghana and Africa as a whole, especially, by the Christian missionaries, created a gap between the local people and the schools (Frankema, 2012). The students in these schools were therefore no longer ready to learn any traditional musical instrument of their forefathers neither were they ready to learn any traditional dance because they saw that everything about African culture was devilish as they were taught to believe (Coe, 2005). The cultural identity of a particular person is portrayed in their way of living (Berry, 2005). It is seen in the way they dress, the food they eat, the musical instruments they play, the language they speak, etc. We were taught to dress like them (the Westerners) by putting on coats and tie instead of our traditional cloth like the Kente or any other traditional dress like the Smock because everything about African culture was seen as devilish. We were also taught to speak their language---the Queen's language i.e. the English Language and presently, some children are born in some homes in Ghana where they are not able to speak their own native languages. We were taught to play Western musical instruments and dance to their music and not ours and as a result of this, many Ghanaians play various Western musical instruments without knowing how to play just one traditional musical instrument and also do any Ghanaian dance as well.

In contrast, the culture of our forefathers which traditional music and dance is one of it, must be preserved by this generation and the generations to come without losing focus of it else our culture will soon die and posterity will not spare us, but will continue to blame us. The classroom teacher must now provide children with this growing-up experience, for teaching traditional music in the classroom can be one of the ways of ensuring continuity of culture transmissions. What the teacher provides will not only make for any deficiency in the upbringing of children but also strengthen their consciousness of identity (Cooper, 2007).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study centered on examining the challenges of teaching music and dance using Tamale International School as a case study. It also sought to analyze the existing music and dance syllabus. In this regard the participants included one music teacher and the headteacher drawn from Tamale International school. These participants were purposively selected as a result of their roles as music and dance teacher and as the administrator respectively in the school. The data was collected with interviews as well as document analysis. The interview sought to collect information on the challenges of teaching the subject in the school. The Music and Dance teacher and the headteacher were interviewed separately in their offices within todespitecanan hour each. Interview results were recorded with a recording device and transcribed. Like Gubrium and Holstein (2002) postulated, an interview is a conversation for gathering information. A research interview involves an interviewer who coordinates the process of the conversation and asks questions and an interviewee who responds to those questions. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or over a telephone. In our case, the interviews were done face to face. Document analysis was also used to detail the necessary needed data from the syllabus. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment



topic (Bowen, 2009). Bowen continues that document analysis is a social research method and is an important research tool in its own right, and is an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation, the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). In this regard, the Music and Dance syllabus for Basic schools in Ghana was analyzed. This was to ascertain what constitutes the music curriculum; how Africanized the curriculum is, which to a large extent has some impact on how music lessons would be taught. Member checking was done with the respondents to check if every information transcribed was exactly the data provided.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As enshrined in the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD), the document analysis revealed that the syllabus is about 80% traditional music and 20% Western music with an emphasis on Composition, Performance, Listening, and Observation. The three aspects (composition, performance, and listening & observing) run through all the class levels. In the composition aspect, it deals with sound exploration, pitch notation, writing of sounds, improvising sound, rhythmic notation, and writing of simple melodies. The performance aspect deals with movement exploration, African dance performances, improvising movement patterns, and performing simple drum patterns. On listening and observing, students are supposed to listen to a variety of music, observing some indigenous dances, and critiquing. The syllabus has the aim of:

- contributing to national artistic excellence
- developing the desire to participate in the Performing Arts with imagination
- developing initiative and understanding creativity in the performing arts and in other artistic activities and
- perceiving and enjoying the expressive qualities of Music, Dance and Drama through critical listening and observation, improvisation, composition, performance, and appreciation.

Composition focuses on pupils' own creations, including classroom improvisation, individual and group projects. Performance involves pupils in the presentation of their original works, as well as indigenous and contemporary art forms. Analysis and discussion of pupils' own works and existing indigenous and contemporary artworks are covered by Listening and Observation. It was also observed that the Music and Dance syllabus intends to promote creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and perception. With creativity, pupils are expected to produce novel work that is accepted as tenable, useful, or satisfying by a group at some point in time. For instance, creativity includes novel composition, improvisation, recreation of existing works, and interpretation. Aesthetic sensitivity concerns the individual's response to the qualities of the Arts. It involves the development of an attitude that promotes initiative and the desire to continue to participate in and value the performing arts. Aesthetic sensitivity is a quality that consists of a number of learning and behavioural levels such as receiving, responding, valuing, and organizing music (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). Perception is the knowledge and ability to identify and isolate the organization of elements in an existing or spontaneous creative work (Lemon & Sahota,





2004). It involves the ability to break down a piece of material into its component parts; to differentiate, compare, distinguish, outline, separate and identify significant points in a piece of music.

It is clear that the focus of the syllabus makes room for more African music content reflecting in the kind of cultural education being echoed in Ghana. Flolu and Amuah (2003) opined that cultural education embodies music education. They express that similarly; music education can be regarded as part of cultural education in a broad sense, but there are practical difficulties that need to be solved before the program can be educationally meaningful. Flolu and Amuah further express that the first difficulty is the misconception of Ghanaian music. The syllabus lists elements of the rudiments and theory of Western classical music but suggests the use of Ghanaian songs in teaching those concepts. Where aspects from Ghanaian music are stated, the suggested activities are based on the same approach with which Western music theory is taught. The result is that Ghanaian music is presented to Ghanaian children in class as an imported material (Flolu & Amuah, 2003). This was corroborated by Flolu (2003) who said that every cultural system has set of ways of imparting knowledge to the younger generation. Learning African music requires, therefore, an understanding of the cultural system, the creative principles of the music, and the methods by which that music is transferred from one person to another. Flolu further expresses that Western art music is widely understood and appreciated because of a universal understanding and appreciation of Western cultures in general and in particular, the systems of imparting knowledge.

It is worth stating that it is the duty of all teachers teaching music and dance to know traditional songs. Teachers living in big cities and towns will find it difficult to know such traditional songs except for teachers who live in the villages where such traditional songs are sung very often. For instance, story-telling in the villages are always accompanied by the singing of traditional songs and as such, as the teacher learns to sing these songs, he/she will be able to teach his/her students. Teachers living in big towns and cities should be encouraged to make every effort to learn these traditional songs from the expert traditional musicians invited from the communities to teach traditional music to the students in their schools (Finnegan, 2007). This is so because traditional music should be performed and accompanied by traditional songs and the students must be able to learn these traditional songs from the teachers. Just like what Mereku and Ohene- Okantah, (2010) advised, if the beneath areas embedded in the syllabus are taught by the teachers, we will be able to achieve our aspirations and the rationale for teaching music and dance.

### ***Song Repertoire***

Students need a diverse repertoire including:

- Story-telling songs.
- Songs of various dance forms (Adowa, Agbadza, etc.).
- Festival songs (Homowo, Aboakyer, etc.).
- Lullabies.
- Children's game songs.



- Songs of rite-de-passage (outdooing, funeral, etc.).
- Work songs.
- Ghanaian art compositions.
- Contemporary gospel music (highlife, reggae, hip-life, etc.).

### ***Drumming***

Students do not have to be master drummers, but need to have a fair knowledge about drumming. Students must, therefore:

- know African instruments by name and classification.
- understand tuning systems and what instruments could be substituted with another.
- be able to internalize rhythmic patterns so as to be able to keep timelines.
- be able to demonstrate the technique of playing a high-pitched supporting drum.
- be able to demonstrate the technique of playing a medium-pitched supporting drum.
- be conversant with master drum technique.

### ***Dancing***

Like drumming, students need a fair knowledge of how to do Ghanaian dances. Students must be able to:

- distinguish between Ghanaian dances by name when dance movements are being made.
- identify Ghanaian dances when a song is being sung with a timeline.
- demonstrate simple uses of movements and gestures say, in *Adowa* and *Agbadza*.
- explain simple symbolic gestures in dance.
- use various shapes, forms, and structures and organize them into a series of movements to create a dance; in other words, students must be able to compose a dance.

### ***Dance Drama***

Like drumming and dancing, students need a fair knowledge of how to plan a simple drama. The following are important aspects that students must be able to handle competently:

- Creating the plot (i.e. writing the script).
- Assigning characters.



- Getting the scenes.
- Dancing that will accompany acting (choreography).
- Singing that will accompany drumming and dancing.
- Drumming that will accompany dancing.
- Costume.
- Make-up.
- Props and furniture.
- Rehearsal techniques.

Students need a diverse repertoire of African literature which includes children's musical games, folk tales (animal trickster prose narratives) and proverbs. Thus, music and dance taught in the school would help the students to know some of their culture and the invitation of the expert traditional musicians from the community to teach traditional music to the students if regularly done, will also augment the learning process. Teachers could also learn traditional dance from the Internet, video C. D's and can also record the dances on their Mobile phones and in turn, teach their students so that the challenges can be minimized.

One of the challenges of teaching music and dance as revealed by the respondents was the music teacher's inability to teach the students the several traditional music and dance content in the syllabus. This is due to the fact that he lacks the requisite and adequate knowledge of traditional music to be able to handle the syllabus appropriately. The music teacher normally teaches general music theory in combination with the teaching of Western musical instruments to the students. Traditional music is not taught very often in the school as a result of the cultivated habit of perceiving African music as devilish. Indeed, this policy is not helpful for the promotion of the Africanization of the music curriculum in Ghanaian schools. On this policy, the headteacher gave the background:

*The introduction of formal education in Ghana and Africa as a whole especially by the Christian missionaries created a gap between the local people and the schools. The students in the school therefore were no longer ready to learn any traditional musical instrument of their forefathers neither were they ready to learn any traditional dance because they saw that everything about African culture was devilish as they were taught to believe.*

He explained further that the cultural identity of a particular people is portrayed in their way of living. It is seen in the way they dress, the food they eat, the musical instruments they play, the language they speak, etc. We were taught to dress like them (the Westerners) by putting on coats and tie instead of our traditional cloth like the Kente or any other traditional dress like the Smock because everything about African culture was seen as devilish. However, do we have to remain sacrosanct to this historical factor? The culture of our forefathers which traditional music and dance are a part of must be preserved by this generation and the generations to come without losing focus of it else our culture will





soon die and posterity will not spare us but will continue to blame us. Nketia (1999) corroborated this and explained the need to teach the African child African concepts:

The classroom teacher must now provide children with this growing-up experience, for teaching traditional music in the classroom can be one of the ways of ensuring continuity of culture transmissions. What the teacher provides will not only make for any deficiency in the upbringing of children but also strengthened their consciousness of identity. (p. 12)

As a result of the inability of the teacher to teach the students on many traditional dances in Tamale International school, most students had lost interest in traditional music as the music class sometimes become boring because of the monotony of Western notations and rhythmic dictations.

According to Nketia (1999), the curricular and the pedagogical decisions taken by the teacher is a necessary instrument in laying a strong foundation. This can be effectively applied if he is guided by a philosophy of music education that takes problems and issues. Such philosophies are generally intended to clarify the basic premise or set of ideas from which goals, objectives, and principles for the systematic teaching of music in a format setting could be derived (Jones, 1992). Nketia further said that the formulation of such philosophies is generally guided by a vision of what music as a subject of instruction and learning experience can contribute to the intellectual, social and cultural development of the individual. This vision may in turn be inspired by:

- (a) intimate knowledge of the musical culture, including its range of materials and dance vocabulary, corpus of music and dance as well as concepts and values that guide music making and
- (b) insights into the dynamic relationship between music and society, including current intellectual or ideological trends in the environment in which music and dance are cultivated, such as multiculturalism, gender balance and the right of the individual to education.

In his view, Carver (2003) was of the view that contemporary music education in Africa is dominated by indigenous styles that should be a part of the core curriculum. However, the move from what is often an informal learning context to the formal context of schools presents a challenge. If communities chose to develop music theory for their own musical practices, the question that must first be addressed is: does a Western approach to theory represent different kinds of African music accurately? Educators tend to use Western methods to teach students African music. By this, she meant that students used written sources to prepare for lessons instead of engaging themselves in an oral approach to learning. Similarly, Dzansi-McPalm (2006) was of the view that currently, African countries, including Ghana are making tremendous efforts to design African indigenous music curricula. Formal music education could reflect on issues such as performance, cultural identity, and community values. Schools could be enriched by inviting song leaders to share the artistic/aesthetic values that they portray in their performances that integrate composition, performance and listening.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The teacher should be patient when teaching traditional music in order not to rush so as to win the interest of the students. This is not the music that students are used to and it is the duty of the teacher to boost the students' morale towards traditional music. The teacher can also use flashboards of the various traditional musical instruments to teach for simplicity. Boamajeh and Ohene-Okantah (2000, p.12) also stated that "traditional musical groups should be invited to give performances to the whole school about once every month. Tapes, records, radio, television, films, videotapes provide useful instructional aids teachers can fall on to deliver. According to Boamajeh and Ohene-Okantah (2000), in Africa, it is difficult to obtain these, but teachers should collect anthologies of African songs and compile texts that can be used for teaching. If African music is to be meaningful, it must be studied within the context of traditional African life. Music is an integral part of the life of every African soon after birth. This should be given all the encouragement of formal education.

Again, Boamajeh and Ohene-Okantah (2000) cited Campbell & Scott-Kassner (1994) that, the oral/aural approach can be easily applied when a traditional song or instrumental piece is being performed. Since notation is not pervasive, it may not be able to replace direct contact with musical sounds through listening, the most direct route. According to Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2018), notational literacy is an important goal of music instruction, for achieving cultural literacy. The understanding, the oral/aural process by which music is taught and learned temporarily overrides the more traditional curricular objectives. The sentiments of songs taught need constant reassessment together with allegiance of pupils to whom it now appears irrelevant (Boamajeh & Ohene-Okantah, 2000).

The teacher, after inviting the traditional musicians from the communities to the school, must be prepared to learn traditional music and dance from these experts. He/she should not think it is too late to learn because, with determination, it is possible to make achievements in a matter of time. For the Africanization of the music curriculum in Ghanaian schools to be realized in Tamale International School, traditional music should be taught very often and by so doing, it will be able to boost the interest of students in this type of music. The content of the syllabus by the Ministry of Education is taught by the teachers in spite of the fact the teachers themselves were lacking adequate knowledge in traditional music. The documentation of how to teach traditional music (pedagogy), if provided in the syllabus, will help teachers to know how to teach traditional music to the students. When students are able to get music textbooks and music manuscripts in their schools in addition to the teachers' guides (i.e. teachers' handbooks), the teaching and learning in the schools will be enhanced. Equipment such as video deck, television set and video Compact Discs (CDs) containing the various traditional music and dance could be tapped to promote the teaching and learning of traditional music in the schools.



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