

Teaching of Rhythm Fundamentals through Indigenous Songs in Zimbabwean Primary Schools

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Abstract

There is concern that most of the songs used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm are mainly derived from outside children's cultural song repertoire. This qualitative study seeks to address the challenge by exploring how indigenous music compositions can be utilised in developing basics of rhythm in learners. A phenomenological design was used in which selected music teachers were interviewed on how they teach fundamental rhythmic aspects. Observations of Music lessons were also carried out. Findings revealed that music teachers still face the problem of getting songbooks with pasichigare songs. Most schools are still relying on Western songbooks as their major source when teaching basic concepts of rhythm. The research concluded that children develop the ability to interpret rhythm better when indigenous music compositions are used. The study, therefore, recommends that music educators need to transcribe more indigenous music compositions to supplement the readily available content for the teaching of fundamentals of rhythm.

Key words: *Rhythm, Indigenous music, cultural song repertoire, Zim-Pasichigare-RhythmEdu*

Introduction

The focus of this study is on the usefulness of indigenous songs when teaching fundamentals of rhythm. While it is true that the development of music literacy has been facilitated by the use of songs, the Zimbabwean situation remains tricky since most of the songbooks still being used in schools are Western-oriented. Songs have been used in teaching musical concepts since the beginning of formal education. Music elements like pitch, rhythm, melody, harmony,

texture and form are all studied through the use of songs. Kamien (2018) provides an approach to perspective listening of songs as a base for the learning of musical elements. Of similar perception are Duke (2009) and Dalcroze, cited in Landis and Carder (1990), who also view song and solfege as the basis for the development of music literacy in children. Using songs in teaching music literacy, therefore, helps children comprehend concepts better as they are given the opportunity to perform and feel the effects of musical elements. The researchers felt that while the use of songs assist learners in understanding rhythm fundamentals, there is still need to select the appropriate songs which learners understand so that they may understand the intended concepts with ease. Teachers seem to be over-relying on readily provided guidebooks. While these may be helpful in providing basic knowledge on development of music literacy, too much reliance on them would deter a deeper understanding of musical elements in both the teacher and the child (Ziso, cited in Maraire, 1998).

The music that is used to teach musical literacy should come from the local community (Mataruse, 2018). Teaching of music through indigenous songs can, therefore, be useful in developing fundamentals of musical elements like rhythm in learners. Most traditional music performances in primary schools are done for the purpose of competitions. Sometimes, these traditional indigenous songs are performed on various special occasions that may appear on school calendars, for example the Jikinya Traditional Dance Festival. The songs used at such festivals are from the children's cultural heritage and written in language understood better by the performers. Outside the school setting, children perform traditional songs in games as well as other ritual and secular settings. It is of interest to note that from these compositions, elements necessary for music literacy development can be sifted. These include rhythm, pitch, melody, harmony, texture and form. These indigenous compositions may, therefore, be used by music educators for the development of music literacy in children (Dobszay, 2009). It is also noted by Blacking (1990) that music becomes meaningful when defined in terms of those who make it. Blacking's view makes music relative because musical conception differs from community to community. The music of Africa is clearly diverse in the way that it sounds from area to area as well as how it is used in the society. Therefore, Music teachers should carefully study the various backgrounds of learners and select the appropriate songs to use (Dawn & Kay, 2015; Rocheleau, 2009).

In order to clearly reveal the relevance of teaching fundamentals of rhythm through the use of indigenous songs, this study is largely informed by Shi'nichi Suzuki's method of Mother Tongue. Of particular interest to this study is the birth of the Zim-Pasichigare-RhythmEdu Approach; an approach that calls for the use of Zimbabwean *pasichigare* songs in teaching of fundamentals of rhythm in Zimbabwean primary schools. The idea with this approach is that teachers should make use of songs from children's cultural repertoire to teach concepts of rhythm to avoid learners from learning the song first and then the intended concept.

Statement of the problem

The issue of sources of songs for teaching music literacy has been a concern for a long time. Although the Curriculum Development and Technical Services (CDTS) encourages the use of local songs in teaching musical concepts, little has been done in an effort to come up with sources where the local songs may be found (Mugochi, 1988). It remains the duty of the music educator to identify songs that may be used in teaching music literacy. The sources of songs available are mostly Western. Teaching music literacy to African children using the music from the West would be an uphill task for African music educators. Zimbabwe has her own traditional compositions that may be used by music educators to develop music literacy, and in particular, fundamentals of rhythm. A number of studies have also been conducted that encourages the use of indigenous songs to teach musical concepts. Among them are Chernoff (1981) on African rhythm and African sensibility and Shizha (2013) on counter visioning contemporary African education. While such studies have played a pivotal role in the development of musical literacy in African learners, there still remains a gap on how these songs can be used for teaching particular concepts such as fundamentals of rhythm. Very little is documented on African traditional compositions. Indigenous African music has relied entirely on an oral tradition of transmitting musical knowledge (Nompula, 2011). Having noted this, researchers decided to carry out a study on teaching fundamentals of rhythm through indigenous music compositions.

Research question

How can indigenous songs be used to teach fundamentals of rhythm to native children in Zimbabwean primary schools?

Literature review

Coughlin (2012) defines rhythm as the arrangement of sounds as they move through time. The term rhythm is also used to describe a specific pattern of sounds. In a very simple form, music can be created by clapping hands at specific times. Fundamentals of rhythm include musical elements like tempo, note values, meter and key signatures (Fox, 2002). The current research intended to investigate how these fundamentals of rhythm can be taught using the learners' cultural repertoire. In an effort to address the above concern, the researchers reviewed several related literature on how musical literacy in the acquisition of rhythm could best be achieved by learners within a formal education situation.

Sadie (1980) defines music literacy as the ability to read and write musical elements that include pitch, rhythm, texture, harmony, form and other musical concepts. It is of interest to note that a number of authorities have agreed on the fact that music literacy can best be taught through the use of songs (Doneski, 2011). Michelson (1994) also argues that the choir remains a viable artistic expression and a highly effective educational vehicle for the development of musical abilities, understanding and appreciation. This view by Michelson would suggest that while choral music has the goal of enabling students to experience the joy of singing, indigenous songs may also be used as a vehicle for teaching music literacy to children. Grout (2001) has used the songs by Schubert to explain the elements of music that range from rhythm to form. Kodaly, cited in Dobszay (1972), also believes that children should first learn their own music from their own cultural heritage. According to Kodaly, it is through these songs that the skills and concepts necessary to achieve musical literacy may be taught. Children should, however, be given the opportunity to study and perform other styles of music later, outside their own music (DfE, 2011). Having noted the above philosophies, the researchers decided to carry out a study to investigate whether it is proper to use the indigenous songs to teach fundamentals of rhythm to learners.

Currently, most music educators have a tendency of using music that has been removed from its meaning. The subject would be more interesting if music teachers carefully select songs that are familiar to learners and use them in the teaching of musical concepts. This method was

developed in the Mid-Twentieth Century after World War Two by Suzuki. Suzuki's method rests on the principle that all children have the ability to perform music and that this ability can best be enhanced by a nurturing milieu. He believes that, all over the world, children develop their language faster if they learn it in a natural environment. His argument rests on the idea that if the same nurturing environment found in language acquisition is established in schools and, especially when teaching other skills, learning can be easier. Suzuki views his method as the Mother Tongue and in music education the method is popularly known as the Talent Education (Kara, 2015).

Suzuki (1968:55) says that, "I want to make good citizens. If a child hears fine music from the day of his birth and learns to play it himself, he develops sensitivity, discipline and endurance. He gets a beautiful heart". Suzuki is convinced that, if all pupils are properly educated, they would be capable of achieving musical skills. This further reveals the relevance of successful instruction that is conducted under a nurturing environment that pupils in schools are used to. The building block of this method is found in the philosophy's emphasis on positive environment, repertoire, listening, parental involvement, repetition, love, step by step mastery and vocabulary. The fundamental argument is largely based on Suzuki's theories of language (with principals that encourage early beginning, listening, loving encouragement, parent support, constant repetition, learning with other children and learning to read) stipulate the idea that all people can best learn from their environment. All in all, his philosophy is best summarised by his popular quotation that, "...all children can be well educated..." This, therefore, suited this study in that children can best be taught fundamentals of rhythm using examples of traditional songs, mostly folksongs.

Methodology

In examining the impact of indigenous music compositions on teaching fundamentals of rhythm, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative approach helped in capturing the complexity of everyday behaviour of the research participants (Rahman, 2017; Ochieng, 2009). Thus, a phenomenological design was employed in which the researchers sought to have a better understanding of the phenomenon of music teaching. Data for this study were collected from teachers and observations of music lessons on rhythm fundamentals from selected primary schools.

Since the researchers targeted the teaching of fundamentals of rhythm through indigenous music compositions, ten primary schools and ten primary school teachers who were not music specialists were purposively sampled for this study. This was because the research aimed at assisting the primary school teachers who are not music specialists but at the same time supposed to deliver music lessons. According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004), purposive sampling is the most appropriate method for selecting participants when there is limited population to sample from. The ten teachers were provided each with five copies of Zimbabwean indigenous songs namely *Tinotsvaga Maonde*, *Tsuro Darika Mutanda*, *Chimbwa Chemusango*, *Sarura Wako* and *Chamutengure*. The researchers transcribed and guided the teachers on how these songs could be used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm to Zimbabwean learners. An example of how the participants were guided in using indigenous songs in teaching fundamentals of rhythm was done using the following song.

Tinotsvaga Maonde

Ti notsvaka ma o nde ma o nde ma o nde Ti no tsvaka ma o nde ma sikati a noooo
ta te ta te ta tetaa ta tetaa ta tetaa ta te ta te ta tetaa ta tatetaataataa aa

The basic music rhythm is represented by note values namely semi breve (taaaaaa aa), minim (taa aa, crotchet (taa), quaver (ta), semi quaver (tate) and so on as shown above. The respondents of this study were provided with the five songs transcribed in such a manner as on *Tinotsvaga Maonde* above and asked to use the songs in teaching fundamentals of rhythm to primary school learners. Researchers observed and guided all the ten respondents while using songs provided in rhythm lessons. The researchers assisted respondents on how concepts like note values, relationships between note values and meter could be used on the songs which were provided. Respondents were also later interviewed on how useful such songs were in teaching fundamentals of rhythm. The guided approach saw the birth of the new approach which could be used to teach fundamentals of rhythmic concepts.

Findings from the interviews

Three major themes were drawn from data from interviews. These also guided the researchers on data analysis. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used where researchers identified participants by name.

Methods used in teaching rhythm fundamentals

Participants were asked on the methods they used to teach rhythmic elements of Music. The following were the major responses given:

Most of the respondents indicated that they used the traditional method where exotic and mainly Western songs were used to teach fundamentals of rhythm in music. Almost all respondents agreed that during lessons on elements of rhythm, they engaged learners on practical activities that involve clapping, stepping and tapping to different time flows in different songs. Respondents also concurred that one of the major methods they used to teach fundamentals of rhythm was to make sure that learners sang and responded to music in time using their body parts. Of particular interest was the fact that these respondents used the readily available songbooks as their sources of content for teaching fundamentals of rhythm. This was revealed by one of the respondents called Mussorri who had this to say, “I am lucky that the school has a few Brown series text books to be used in teaching Music. From such text books, I normally use the songs like ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’, ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’, ‘This Old Man’ and so on in teaching fundamentals of rhythm”.

The above responses show that teachers use traditional methods of teaching fundamentals of rhythm. While practical activities that include clapping, stepping and tapping assist learners in understanding fundamentals of rhythm, the use of old and traditional textbooks like the Brown Series may have inappropriate songs for the learners

Use of indigenous songs in teaching fundamentals of rhythm

After being provided with selected indigenous songs and guided on how to use them in teaching rhythm, teachers were also interviewed on their perceptions on the effectiveness of the indigenous songs in teaching fundamentals of rhythm and the following major responses were given:

Almost all respondents were surprised to realise that learners’ Mother Tongue songs could be effectively used to teach fundamentals of rhythm. It was also noted by respondents that learners grasped concepts with ease when indigenous/*pasichigare* songs were, used in the teaching of fundamentals of rhythm. Mahere, however, came up with a different view when he indicated that it required music specialists to come up with appropriate indigenous songs that could be used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm.

The above responses show that teachers enjoyed the use of indigenous songs in teaching of fundamentals of rhythm. All teachers agreed that the use of songs from children's cultural repertoire eased the teaching of fundamentals of rhythm. This was revealed where they concurred that, instead of starting by teaching a new song, the teacher just introduces the song and easily start picking the targeted elements of rhythm from the selected song. Some of the teachers, however, indicated that it might be difficult to select the appropriate songs as well as finding the rhythmic aspects that could be taught from these songs.

How indigenous songs can be used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm

After being given some clues by the researchers on how to use indigenous songs in teaching rhythm, respondents made the following:

1. "It is interesting to note that the syllables in different song lyrics form the basis of rhythm in music. Since music syllables are assigned different time lengths, different note values can also be taught."
2. "Through breaking song syllables, one can easily show the relationships between different note values in music rhythm."

It was also discovered that one could teach time signatures (an element of rhythm) using indigenous songs. Clapping to the song can easily leads one in finding out the weak and strong beats which would guide in coming up with a time signature.

The responses given show that teachers need to be encouraged to venture into children's cultural repertoire and this would ease the teaching and learning of rhythm fundamentals in primary schools. All the interviewees indicated that once given a clue, they could employ an approach where indigenous songs can be used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm.

Findings from lesson observations

The researchers also observed rhythm lessons while teachers were using the indigenous songs which were provided. The major finding from the observations was that, besides aiding the learners' comprehension of elements of rhythm, the use of indigenous songs also enabled teachers to teach a number of elements within a short space of time. This

was because teachers were no longer wasting time teaching the song first and then switching on to the intended concepts. From the songs which were provided, all the teachers were able to teach elements of rhythm that included note values, note relationships as well as time signatures. Most of the lessons which were lively, interesting and most of the learners participated actively. In some of the classes which were observed, however, time tended to be wasted by performing the songs from children's cultural repertoire at the expense of learning the fundamentals of rhythm. This was probably due to the fact that both teachers and learners were not used to theory of music that is associated with their own songs. African music was seen as serving other purposes other than teaching music theory concepts like rhythm.

Discussion

Responses from interviews and lesson observations show that indigenous songs could be used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm that include note values, beat, tempo and measures/ time signatures. The findings of this study indicate that the use of indigenous songs in teaching fundamentals of rhythm is effective. The findings go along with the philosophies of Kodaly, Suzuki, Dalcroze and Orff, who advocate for the use of songs that are familiar to children for easy comprehension of musical elements (Dobszay, 2009; Suzuki, 1968). The study also revealed the effectiveness of using local compositions in teaching rhythm since all teachers agreed that the songs which were used for this study had elements that could be used in teaching fundamentals of rhythm. Respondents also agreed that a new approach that advocates for the use of indigenous *pasichigare* (extending from time immemorial) songs in teaching fundamentals of rhythm should be introduced. Both respondents and researchers finally settled on naming this approach as The Zim-Pasichigare-RhythmEdu.

Indigenous music compositions are, therefore, relevant in the teaching and learning of music literacy and rhythm in particular (Mugochi, 1988). This view is validated by the general consensus of music educators and philosophers such as Dacroze and Suzukiin that a bridge between informal and formal education is yet to be established. They argue that as children grow they are accompanied by vast experience found in the natural world. This world is the natural environment referred to by Suzuki as the orbit of The Mother Tongue (Suzuki, 1968; Mead, 1994; Moyo, 1995). Teachers and parents are believed to have vast relevant content

towards the teaching of musical elements and the best way of imparting this knowledge to pupils is by making use of typical folk songs found in the society in which the children grow up. Children have shown better understanding of the concepts when indigenous music compositions are used. Children develop the ability to interpret rhythm better when indigenous music compositions are used to teach music literacy. Furthermore, it may be argued that, the duty of music educators is to transcribe relevant songs that may be used in teaching music concepts. Relying on readily available sources of content may not be to the advantage of both the learner and the educator as these sources may be difficult for them to understand.

Conclusion

From the interviews and observations carried out on the teaching of rhythm in Zimbabwean primary schools, it was noted that when *pasichigare* songs were used, learners actively participated throughout the lessons. Learners showed little difficulties in grasping the fundamentals of rhythmic concepts. Thus, teachers indicated that indigenous or *pasichigare* songs could be more effective in teaching rhythm fundamentals. All songs, whether indigenous or exotic, have syllables that can be broken into various time values to be used teaching rhythm. However, breaking syllables of children's own songs would put learners at an advantage since they would be learning from known to unknown. On the other hand, using Western songbooks in teaching fundamentals of rhythm deprive African learners from mastering rhythmic concepts which are critical in developing music literacy. As such, the study concludes that learners learn and understand music rhythmic concepts when teachers use traditional or *pasichigare* songs indigenous to learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were given.

Music educators should take advantage of the songs performed in the local community in teaching fundamentals of rhythm. This would make music lessons interesting and easy to comprehend since children would discover that musical elements for understanding fundamentals of rhythm can be derived from their own songs. Music educators need not over rely on readily available content that maybe outside the child's repertoire when teaching rhythm. This study also recommends that music educators should be encouraged to use music

that is familiar to children so that the learners comprehend musical elements with ease. This would, in a way, go along with Suzuki's philosophy of Talent Education where it is argued that all children can well be educated if they are properly taught. Music educators are also expected to make an effort to transcribe music that is familiar to children to supplement the readily available content for teaching fundamentals of rhythm. Transcription of indigenous songs would help in transmitting African songs through literal means instead of the traditional oral means of transmitting music from generation to generation. The research finally encourages the Zimbabwean music educators to use the Zim-Pasichigare-RhythmEdu Approach that is proposed in this study. While this approach mainly focuses on teaching rhythm to Zimbabwean learners, there is still room for further research where researchers can come up with their own transcriptions that suit their countries other than Zimbabwe.

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