

## THE USE OF MUSIC AS A PANACEA TO THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract:** The need for an effective tool for teaching and learning, which is the yearning of both teachers and students, has necessitated this paper. This effective and viable tool is known to be Music and it has been proven over time. This paper seeks to define the concepts music, teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also suggests how necessary it is to encourage music education in the classroom for effective learning. The paper states how education can be brought home, using the instrumentality of music, enumerating its effects when intentionally used in the classroom. Again, it spells out specific ways music can be used in the classroom and recommends training of teachers on the principles of using music, and the need to introduce music as a subject at all levels of education and the corporation of both the teachers and the learners for motivation. Finally, it indicates how music is used to retain and sustain concepts in Nigeria that have been held in high esteem.

**Keywords:** Music, Teaching, Learning, Music Education

### INTRODUCTION

All teachers, brand new ones to very seasoned, need quick, easy-to-use tools to help them teach. Over the years, teachers have struggled with great pain and effort to make learning possible, fun and inviting to the pupils/students. Recently, research has shown that concepts and ideas can be put in rhymes and rhythm and be sung in the classroom. What the learners must have struggled over time to assimilate will be consumed unknowingly without difficulty and it can be recalled at ease. This paper gives teachers information on how

music can be effectively used in teaching and learning situation. With the rate of failure in both tertiary and secondary institutions, it shows that something is wrong with the method of learning. Students and teachers only work for exams not for life-long applications and experience and the cause of this could be traced back to the primary school level. To help students retain and recall what they learn, there is the need to use correct method of teaching and learning and one of the methods in the use of music in the teaching and learning situation in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Music**

An accurate and concise definition of music is fundamental to being able to discuss, categorize and otherwise consider the phenomenon of what we understand as being music. Several sources have the following to say about music. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines music as, 'Sounds that are arranged in a way that is pleasant or exciting to listen to'. The Oxford Universal Dictionary puts it as, 'That one of the fine arts which is concerned with the combination of sounds with a view of beauty of form and the expression of thought or feeling'. ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). According to Ludwig van Beethoven (1995), 'Music is the electrical soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents'. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LudwigvanBeethoven](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LudwigvanBeethoven)). Music is also seen as 'an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through elements of rhythm, melody, harmony and colour'. ([dictionary.reference.com/browse/follow](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/follow)). Considering the above definitions, we therefore, define music as a combination of sounds that are pleasant to the ear.

### **Teaching**

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, teaching means to cause to know, to guide the studies of something, to impart the knowledge of something, to instruct. ([www.merriam.webster.com](http://www.merriam.webster.com)). In same vein, Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary puts it that, 'Teaching is the ideas of a particular person or group, especially about politics, religion

or society that are taught to other people'. The Free Dictionary (2003–2011) defines teaching as 'The activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart knowledge or skill'. ([www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com)). From the above shades of definitions, teaching is not a casual task, it has never been and it should not be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It requires deliberate and focused intention by teachers who are ready to impart their pupils/students with values that will always be remembered when they themselves have long been forgotten.

### **Learning**

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, learning is the knowledge that you get from reading and studying. Dictionary.com defines learning as, 'Knowledge acquired by systematic study in any field of scholarly application', also as 'the act or process of acquiring knowledge or skill'. ([www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). 'The act of acquiring new, or modifying and reinforcing, existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information'. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclopedia)). 'Learning is a permanent change in behavior brought about by experience'. ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behaviourism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behaviourism)). Considering the above shades of definitions, one can obviously sense a glimpse of the effective role music can play when correctly employed in teaching and learning environments in the society. Therefore, may I devote the next discussion on how music can be used for effective learning?

### **Music Education**

Whether a child sings or not, is bound to benefit from some form of music education research shows that learning do-re-mi can help children excel in ways beyond the basic ABCs. Research has found that learning music facilitates learning other subjects and enhances skills that children inevitably use in other areas. A music-rich-experience for children of singing, listening and moving is really bringing a very serious benefit to children as they progress into more formal learning. 'When you look at children ages two to nine, one of

the breakthroughs in that area is music's benefit for language development, which is so important at that stage'. ([www.pbs.org/parents/education/music](http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music)). Music is a tool that is developmentally appropriate, facilitates language fluency, helps brain development and above all else, is joyful. ([www.literacyresourceinc.com](http://www.literacyresourceinc.com))

While children come into the world ready to decode sounds and words, music education helps enhance those natural abilities. 'Growing-up in musically rich environment is often advantageous for children's language development'. ([www.pbs.org/parents/education/music](http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music)). The effect of music education on language development can be seen in the brain. Recent studies have clearly indicated that musical training physically develops the part of the left side of the brain known to be involved with processing language, and can actually wire the brain's circuits in specific ways. Linking familiar songs to new information can also help imprint information on young minds. ([hillsong.com/kids](http://hillsong.com/kids)). We all know how greatly music affects our feelings and energy levels. Without even thinking about it, we use music to create desired moods to make-- us happy, to enjoy movement and dance, to energize emotionally, to bring back powerful memories, to help us relax and focus. Music is a powerful tool for our personal expression within our daily lives—it helps 'set the scene' for many important experiences and activities including the classroom situation. Throughout time, people have recognized and intentionally used the powerful effects of sound. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the western scientific community has conducted research to validate and expand our analytical knowledge of music. From personal experience, music greatly affects and enhances our learning and living. Research continues to be conducted to provide helpful guidelines for our intentional use of music, especially in the classroom, to provide successful and valuable guidelines for incorporating music into the teaching and learning environment—applicable to all ages and educational settings.

## BRINGING EDUCATION TO LIFE WITH MUSIC

How is it that for most people music is a powerful part of their personal life and yet when we go to work or school we turn it off? The intentional use of music in the classroom will set the scene and learning atmosphere to enhance our teaching and learning activities. When we use music for learning it makes the process much more fun and interesting. Music, one of the joys of life, can be one of the joys of learning as well. With music the teacher can orchestrate a classroom environment that is rich and resonate—and provide learners with a symphony of learning opportunities and a sound education.

Music helps us to learn because it will:

- establish a positive learning state
- create a desired atmosphere
- build a sense of anticipation, among others.

Pic (2006) has this to say, 'As a matter of fact, the use of songs for teaching is so effective that God Himself used it in the life of the Israelites. *Now therefore write this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, ... Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel.* (Deut.31:19, 22 KJV). In the early Church, music was used as a method of instruction in teaching God's Word in local congregations. Paul the apostle instructed the congregation in the Church in Colosse that in order to inculcate God's Word in them, the Word of Christ should dwell in them richly through 'teaching...and admonishing one another in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' (Colossians 3:16). If God in His infinite wisdom will use music in instructing his servants to teach His people, His word, then there must be something about it that makes it a very effective tool in teaching. Dare we conclude any less? (Pic, 2006:21)

## WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WAYS MUSIC CAN BE USED IN THE CLASSROOM?

Here are three possible areas of teaching where integrating music can be highly effective. These techniques work for people of all ages and from many societies. The very young, teens and adults will experience an increase in their effectiveness and joy of learning from these uses of music.

### Learning Information

Music can be used to help us remember learning experiences and information. In Active learning experiences music creates a soundtrack for a learning activity. The soundtrack increases interest and activates the information mentally, physically, or emotionally. Music can also create a highly focused learning state in which vocabulary and reading material is absorbed at a great rate. When information is put to rhythm and rhyme these musical elements will provide a hook for recall. For example, play music with an association for your topic in the background while reading a concise summary of the important information. The more interesting and dramatic the more easily the information is remembered. For example, as adults in the tertiary level of education, while teaching students the Greek and Hebrew alphabets as courses in the CRS Department which is entirely new to them the use of songs (music) have been adopted to enhance their knowledge of the ancient biblical language by setting the Greek and Hebrew alphabets to music and when they sing the alphabetical songs, they easily and quickly memorize the alphabet. The students with serious directionality issues will sing this song quietly while they are writing. It helps them focus on the left to right concept. ([www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/tfl](http://www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/tfl)). Furthermore, music stabilizes mental, physical and emotional rhythms to attain a state of deep concentration and focus in which large amounts of content information can be processed and learned. In addition, songs, chants, poems and raps will improve memory of content, facts and details through rhyme, rhythm and melody. Teaching these to students or having them write their own is a terrific memory tool.

### **Attention, Attitude and Atmosphere**

Preparing for a learning experience can make the difference between lessons well-learned and just passing time. Certain music will create a positive learning atmosphere and help students to feel welcome to participate in the learning experience. In this way it also has great effect upon students' attitudes and motivation to learn. For instance, background music can be used to provide a welcoming atmosphere and help prepare and motivate students for learning tasks. Music can energize lagging attention levels or soothe and calm when necessary. Depending on the music, you can enliven, calm, establish a theme or even give students content information with content-songs. Again, music provides a positive environment that enhances students' interaction and helps develop a sense of community and cooperation. Music is a powerful tool for understanding other cultures and bonding with one another.

### **Personal Expression**

It is an undeniable fact that songs are instinctive to most of us. Whether at work, or we be in church, at home, in school or elsewhere, music is the doorway to the inner realms and the use of music during creative and reflective times facilitates personal expression in writing, art movement and a multitude of projects. Creation of musical compositions offers a pathway to expressing personal feelings and beliefs in the language of musical sound. In a way, background music is used to stimulate internal processing, to facilitate creativity and encourage personal reflection. Also, the creation of music expresses inner thoughts and feelings and develops the musical intelligence through understanding of rhythm, pitch and form. Writing songs related to content, allow students to express how they feel about issues brought up in historic incidents, social studies topics or literature. The use of background music during lectures, vocabulary decoding, or group reading is a cornerstone of Accelerated Learning techniques.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The musical work which permanently pleases is always based upon the principles of its own art, therefore, there is the need to train teachers on the principles of using music or song in the teaching and learning situation in our educational institutions.
2. Music as an academic subject should be taught in our institutions from the primary to tertiary levels so as to help in facilitating the teaching and learning situation using music.
3. The teacher and learner should work together to enhance the teaching and learning situation because the learners' attention and desire must have awakened and aroused by the avenue of music which catches attention and stimulates the desire for knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of this singular yet effective way of teaching cannot be over emphasized. The lyrics or wordings of the National Anthem of Nigeria would have long been forgotten if not that it is put in rhymes and rhythm. Music has the capacity to retain and sustain idea from generation to generation without a single alteration of its ideology. If this method is applied correctly, a lot will be achieved within the shortest possible time as we impart knowledge in this our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

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