

## **Refocusing Indigenous Music for Formal Classroom Practice: A Process of Creating Partnership between the School and the Community**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the modalities and logistics of refocusing indigenous music in formal classroom practice in Kenya in a bid to create partnership between the community and the school. The need to refocus indigenous music for use in classroom stems from the fact that the childhood and youth when the individual traditionally learnt their cultural music practices is now spent in school hence, the need to take this important aspect of music to school to ensure its preservation among the school going youth in the academy. More so, the breakdown in traditional systems of cultural transmission among modernized nations on the continent of Africa has resulted in much of its traditional music being lost or severely misinterpreted. With the urbanized children not having their working parents to induct them into indigenous musical life, the need to take indigenous music to the classroom is more urgent and crucial. But introducing indigenous music in the classroom alone is not enough to determine its preservation. What will determine whether the music is preserved or decayed are the mode (s) of transfer and the treatment of this music in the new context. Currently the way in which indigenous music is recontextualised and treated in the classrooms suggests a process of burning bridges and not building bridges between the cultures from where the music is taken and classroom culture.*

*Using examples derived from the classroom teaching situations and experiences in Kenya, this paper will attempt to answer the following questions:*

*What should happen when indigenous music is recontextualised for classroom use? Should the teacher develop and use culturally appropriate pedagogies that match the music's demands or stick to the conventional teaching methods in music?*

*How do we ensure retention of what is taught in terms of subsequent application in the learners' lives since they are not going to operate in a vacuum once they graduate?*

*How do we make the music learnt relevant in terms of the contemporary challenges?*

*Unless indigenous music is recontextualised for classroom use in such a way that a bridge is built between the cultural practice and classroom demands so that the music can move to and from these two settings for future use by the learners, in a bid to create partnership between the school and the community, it will become a cultural thing that the learners do in their secondary and university education and after that it is dead and forgotten*

### **Introduction**

In Kenya as elsewhere in Africa, scholars of music education have lamented the disproportionate representation of indigenous music within the curriculum (Akuno 1997, 2005). The Kenyan policy makers hid this call and revised their music syllabus with the help of music educators in the year 2002. They added a remarkably large content (as compared to what was there earlier) of African music that if taught exhaustively using culturally appropriate pedagogies derived from the theoretical and performance principles of indigenous music, would go a long way in preserving the music in formal institutions of learning.

Unfortunately this remarkable large content of African music in the curriculum does not translate into the classroom practice. My personal observation of how and what music is taught in the classroom has shown that there is a discrepancy between theory (planning) and practice (execution) in the teaching of African music in Kenya. Lack of resource material has majorly been cited for this discrepancy, but this is yet to be confirmed. For example, what resource material does one need to teach a folksong which is a major syllabus requirement in secondary school? The song itself is the material and the teaching aid in this case. The problem would therefore arise in how the teaching of the folksong is done, what to teach about it, in what environment/context and for what reasons. In other words, what is the intentionality of teaching the folksong? Towards what is the mind directed? This is not so much a problem of the learner, but more a problem of the teacher.

The intentionality is what will determine whether we want to teach the folksong as a past cultural heritage (a dead tradition-something that used to be done) or whether we want to adapt and recontextualise the song to fit the needs

and tastes of the contemporary learners but still retain the nucleus/deep structures of the music that gives it its identity and holds it together (a living tradition where we draw and building the new from the old). This process depends so much on the African music knowledge base and orientation of the teachers, their intentionality (whether they want to fulfill the needs of the syllabus or inculcate in the learners the right practice), the process and mode of execution.

In an attempt to solve the discrepancy in planning and execution, most music educators in Kenya have undertaken studies to prove the viability of indigenous music for instructional use in formal classroom. Most of these discussions have mainly concentrated on analysis of the intrinsic characteristics of indigenous music (content), value, availability, versatility, and adaptability to justify its use in music education. This has resulted in music educators addressing the problem of access to the music rather than the discrepancy in planning and execution, and retention of the concepts learnt for subsequent application in the learners' lives. Mutuku (2005) even went further and undertook a study in which he proved that African folksongs can not only be used in the teaching of African music components but also Western music concepts e.g. pitch, rhythm, intervals, time signatures etc. In my opinion, these studies were more relevant when the music syllabus was still loaded with Western music components. Studies with such focus were important to pave an entry point for African music into the Kenya music curriculum. However, the revision of the syllabus in 2002 which puts more emphasis on African music, points to another stage of development with a focus on establishing the modalities and logistics of refocusing indigenous music for use in formal classroom environment. Our focus should now aim at emphasizing the teaching of African music for its own sake using culturally appropriate pedagogies that match the demands of the music.

Kidula (2006) acknowledges the fact that African studies were invented by Europeans but maintains that Africans should not merely carry on these disciplines as shaped by Europe. They must re-invent them and such re-invention implies a sharply critical awareness of ideological limits and theoretical and methodological shortcomings of former practices. The Africanist scholars have definitely become aware of the ideological and methodological shortcomings of the European music curriculum and practices as evidenced by the many articles published in local and international refereed journals that enumerate the negative effects of imposition of the Western education system on indigenous African practice. The challenge lies in the determination of the re-invention process, strategies and logistics of recontextualising indigenous music for use in formal institutions.

The formal institutions generally want to see teaching as an active didactic process rather than the provision of an environment for learning. They put emphasis on the students learning how to play or make music and not playing music or making music. This difference in intentionality is described by Scar (1999) as a distinction between a pedagogical framing (i.e. learning how to play music) and an artistic/musical framing (i.e. playing music) respectively. The institutional focus therefore contradicts the nature of music knowing in Africa where the African child grows up performing music- not exactly learning how to perform music (Nzewi 2002). When a child with this kind of orientation moves to the formal institution which emphasizes on the learners being taught how to play music and not advancing in performing music, this retrogressive induction sometimes results in the learners losing interest in taking music as a subject for study or ignoring the teachers' instructions hence, progressing without their expert opinion. And so, the call to bridge the two worlds (traditional instruction and institutional approach) is very crucial.

This call has become increasingly urgent in recent years as the breakdown in traditional systems of cultural transmissions among modernized nations on the continent of Africa has resulted in much of its traditional music being lost or severely misinterpreted. With the urbanized children not having their working parents to induct them into Kenyan musical life, the need to take indigenous music to the classroom to enhance its preservation among the school going youth in the academy is more urgent and crucial. But introducing indigenous music for use in the classroom alone is not enough to ensure its preservation. What will determine whether the music is preserved or decayed are the mode (s) of transfer and the treatment of this music in the new context (classroom). Currently the way in which indigenous music is treated in the classroom leaves one wondering whether the music is being preserved or killed.

It is against this background that this paper examines the modalities and logistics of refocusing indigenous music in formal classroom practice by answering the following questions:

What should happen when indigenous music is recontextualised for classroom use? Should the teacher develop and use culturally appropriate pedagogies that match the music's demands or stick to the conventional teaching methods in music advanced in institutional curriculums?

How do we ensure retention of what is taught in terms of subsequent application in the learners' lives since they are not going to operate in a vacuum once they graduate?

How do we make the music learnt relevant in terms of the contemporary challenges?

## **Problems**

The introduction to the revised secondary school music syllabus (2002), states that:

The music syllabus is designed to involve the cultural expectation of the students. It gives the learner an opportunity to know music of Kenya and that of the rest of the world. The content has been reorganized to enable the learner begin with local Kenya music with a view to identify talent and gradually expanding his/her scope to music of other countries over the four years.

This introduction implies that if the content of the syllabus is adhered to, then we should produce uniquely Kenyan specialist musicians who would effectively employ the process of music making that would enable its citizens appreciate the real value of the 42 Kenyan diverse musical heritage. It is only after appreciating their own music, that the musicians would then see the need of approaching the musical cultures of other people with respect and seriousness.

Unfortunately this is not the case on the ground. The music course has four units namely: basic skills, history and analysis, practicals and project (secondary education syllabus, Vol 4 Sept 2002). The content under basic skills includes rhythm, time signature, melody, harmony and aurals. Analyses of the objectives to be achieved in these sections show that they are inclined towards the Western conceptualization and rationalization of music. For example under melody in secondary school form one, the objectives are that by the end of the subtopic the learner should be able to:

Construct the major scale of C D G A F B $\flat$  and Eb

Name the technical degrees of a major scale

Describe melodic intervals as major, minor or perfect.

Write lyrics to given melody (lyrics patched on to the existing melody).

These objectives contradict what the syllabus is supposed to achieve as outlined in the introduction stated above. There is no objective that is specifically tailored towards learning the different types of the African scales e.g. pentatonic, heptatonic etc. For example, in objective 4, the students are required to patch lyrics on to the existing melody. What are they supposed to achieve through this process? Instead of patching lyrics to existing melody, they should be taught how to compose original melodies.

Apart from the problems of objectives being set in a way that they do not achieve the intention of the revised curriculum as per the introduction above, there are also issues of sequencing of content and content coverage that are liable to misinterpretations. African music is covered under history and analysis, practicals (voice, dance and instruments) and project (field work and visit and participation in music activity). The content to be covered under Analysis of African music in form one for example includes:

Melodic structure-scales, ornaments, solo, choral performances

Ensembles

-Role of instruments

-Interrelationship of the members of the ensemble.

While the content to be covered under analysis of Western music includes analysis of a simple melody in terms of shape, form, dynamics, phrase structure and range. Comparing the two requirements one is left wondering whether African music cannot be analysed in terms of shape, form, dynamics, phrase structure, range etc. It presupposes that these components are a preserve of Western music and do not appear whatsoever in African music. This tells a lot about the position and the inclination of those who designed the syllabus. They are either illiterate about the components of African music or they do not have a working knowledge of the peoples, music.

Another problem arising from the mode of transfer currently used to recontextualise indigenous music for classroom practice is the intentionality of playing African instruments and the examination requirements. Learners are supposed to either perform a traditional dance, folksong or play an instrument. Notice that the intentionality of playing an instrument is to accompany an African song on the instrument. This means that the students are not taught techniques of manipulating the instrument to achieve some level of adeptness and virtuosity in the performance of the instrument. From my observation of practical performance examination at (KCSE) and at the University level, the learners can only play the songs learnt on those instruments. They cannot accompany a song that was not learnt and which is drawn from the same community where the instrument comes from at the spur of the moment as is the practice of instrument playing in African rationalization.

This examination requirement of performing one item of the candidates' own choice from any one of the following categories (voice, dance, instrument-flute, lyre and drum set) encourages compartmentalization of musical arts. This contradicts the performance practice of indigenous music in the cultural context where the three are inseparable and are handled holistically. A study that was undertaken to establish the factors influencing candidates' preference choices in music practical performance at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination in 2007 revealed that majority of candidates performed folksongs with only a few (boys) opting for instruments and that most of the candidates who performed folksongs were girls (Omolo-Ongati 2009:30). Teachers attributed these results to the Kenya National Examination council (KNEC) syllabus requirements, which instruct candidates to perform African

instruments as is done in the traditional context. Certain Kenyan communities discourage females from performing instruments like the Lyre (among the Luo) and certain drums. Teachers therefore advised girls to select folksongs so as not to be penalized for wrong choices. But the students (majority boys) expressed lack of access to tuition on African instruments as their main reason for choosing folksongs, which they could work on by themselves as opposed to instruments. Majority of teachers admitted having insecure background and inadequate instructional strategies and skills in performance of African instruments. They blamed this on their training, which emphasized theory of Western music at the expense of practical performance. And as Daniels (1986) puts it, it is unrealistic to expect that teachers will emphasize in their teaching what was neglected as part of their own musical background. So most of these teachers put emphasis on the singing (voice), which was more pronounced in their training, and ignore instrumental performance, which was not emphasized.

Because the examination of paper 1 is based on one choice, the teachers do not endeavor to instruct the students on all the three components of practical performance. This practice becomes problematic when students are admitted in the universities to undertake a degree course in music. Having been both a student and a lecturer in the only two public universities (Kenyatta and Maseno) that offer degree in music, and now a chairperson of a department, I have realized a persistent problem with preference choices of African instruments amongst students. To assess how practical performance of African instrumental music has been transferred and recontextualised for classroom practice, I will use the case of Maseno University in Kenya, though the prevailing situation in Maseno is common in other Kenyan universities offering music as a degree.

### **Recontextualisation of African instrumental music for classroom practice**

Currently at Maseno University, it is a must that a student of music performs one African and one Western instrument and is examined in both. This requirement gives rise to several problems as enumerated below:

Kenya has 42 tribes some of which have a song tradition like the *Kikuyus* inhabiting central province while others have more of an instrumental tradition like the *Kambas* who inhabit the Eastern province. Most students who come from the *Kikuyu* community perform folksongs at their KCSE examination. This caliber of students join the university without any knowledge of instrument playing yet there is no option of performing a folksong in the university music curriculum.

The issues of the diverse musical cultures notwithstanding, it becomes problematic for students who never had instructions on performance of instruments in secondary school to compete with those who had instrumental performance background. Yet the curriculum is uniformly designed irrespective of the unique entry behaviors of the students.

The other category of students are those who join the university when they are already advanced in skills of playing an instrument having learnt through apprenticeship in the community using pedagogies derived from the theoretical and performance principles of indigenous music. Instead of advancing the knowledge already acquired, the university curriculum forces them to go through an institutional approach, which shifts the focus to learning how to perform music and not performing music.

Usually, students tend to want to play instruments that come from their communities and ones that they have been exposed to before. This is not possible because the department only stocks a limited number of instruments and can only offer tuition on the same. But even if the instruments were available, there is still the problem of the availability of instructors with appropriate knowledge base grounded on indigenous knowledge systems required to teach the instruments. And so the question of how well the instructors are prepared for the task, their musical base and their competence to teach African instrumental performance cannot be ignored. Tuition is offered based on availability of expertise.

Coupled with problem number 4 above is the fact that the teachers who have formal music training often do not have a working knowledge of the natives' music. The diversity of musical cultures in Kenya causes many teachers to doubt their ability to teach in cultures other than their own. Most of these teachers just like the students were trained to play one African instrument and are only vast in their respective instruments.

The problems indicated above are a clear indication that the ground is not level given that the university music curriculum is uniformly designed for all students regardless of their unique entry behaviors. These discrepancies call for urgent intervention measures that would help in bridging the two worlds (traditional instruction and institutional approach). Hence the need to determine the transfer process and logistics of recontextualizing indigenous music for classroom use.

### **Prevailing Teaching-Learning Methods**

According to Kidula (2006), African music became a serious examinable subject in high school in Kenya from 1974. The examination included European music history, theory and performance while, the African section assessed performance and socio-cultural aspects of music which provided insight in music in the life of African more than in

the art and science of music in Africa. The author reiterates that music was offered at undergraduate level from 1977 with a curriculum that included the then –current ethnomusicological theories for studying African music and musical performance. The bulk of the university curriculum was European “art” music. African music was therefore processed as a cultural artifact and understood as a cultural phenomenon rather than a lived, historical process. This situation somehow still prevails in the two public universities that offer music at undergraduate level 32 years later. This is evidenced by the fact that there is no music program designed to produce African music specialists in Kenya. There is also no department of African music and dance which seems to imply that African music and dance might not be worthy of academic study.

Currently the music programs in Kenyan intuitions of learning promote a bi-cultural approach which aims at having a balance between the study of African and Western music. The students are therefore exposed to two cultures which form a part of one’s experience. Nketia in his interview with Wiggins (2005) advises that if we think of the bi-cultural approach in such a way that it is not really two things side by side, but two things that merge, that fit into what we call music, then it is possibly for people to develop ways of thinking that allow them to work in these areas without much difficulties.

But the Kenyan music students and teachers have not been inducted into understanding what it means to be bi-cultural. Bi-culturalism presupposes that the two cultures come into partnership without one dominating the other. As it is currently in Kenya, the music syllabus still lays more emphasis on Western music considering the other partner (African music) as inferior. As a result, most students after training tend to lean on one type of music usually the Western where emphasis was laid in their training and ignore the African component. The teachers on the other hand train African music using Western music pedagogies and methodological approaches. They appropriate African music by merely channeling it into Western methodology. Also because of the ambiguity of the music syllabus, the teachers interpret the syllabus selectively to camouflage their insecure background of African music knowledge. Since most of them do not have a working knowledge of the people’s music, their intentionality in teaching African music is to complete the syllabus and not to inculcate the right performing practice in the learners.

The two pedagogical methods that have been used for learning African music in formal institutions are learning by imitation and learning by and through performance.

Learning by imitation

i). *As it is done*

Imitation has been practiced in the context of “do as I do”. In other words, copy me. In this context, it has become a mechanical activity where the learner takes over knowledge unproblematic from the instructor. When practiced in this manner, imitation only help the learners to acquire one element of action which is skills, while compromising the more complex social behavior and emotional reactions of the instructors action and the humanistic aroma acquired by experiencing the music through participation in a musical culture.

The students are taught individually for 30 minutes once a week. Since most of them have not developed the culture of practicing on their own, they remain dormant until they meet the instructor again the coming week. The individual training compromises the apprenticeship practice where the learners not only learn from the master musician but also from each other’s performance through comparative display.

ii). *As it should be done*

Imitation should be a dialogue between the reflective instructor and his student where the student is at liberty to think and act in practice. The student therefore provides a mirror image of the instructors design by recreating and reconstructing particular aspects of particular performances. This allows the student’s creativity to emerge. According to Schon (1987), imitation is the basis for the reflective practitioner to create a design, where he can coach the student’s performance. The student selects and integrates in his own performances things which are valuable to him. Since imitation is a dialogue between the two performers, the instructor also learns from the student.

Imitation should be understood as an active selective process. The students must build confidence in the teacher as a fellow practitioner with whom they share the same basic idea about how music should be performed. Imitation should therefore be a matter of acquiring certain kind of being in a social musical setting. Learning by imitation is a way of integrating other performers since the concept is rooted in the capacity of one’s bodily presence to be attentive to another, and to pattern movements along the lines of the other, imitating the way the other performs something, but also selecting the occasion on which one will or will not perform according to the methods of another (Nielson 2006:7).

The students should therefore not only imitate the skills but also imitate away of living with the music in a community of practice so that they relate to and with the music. Through imitation, they should strive to unite both the technical (skill) and the expressive (humanizing) components of the music.

Imitation therefore encompasses three aspects. It is:

1. a conscious strategy of learning skills

2. a way of learning how to relate to and with the music
3. a non conscious way of taking over particular habits from the instructor which has little to do with the acquisition of skills but more to do with acting as a performer in context.

### **Learning by and through Performance**

In addition to imitation another way of learning is to be actively involved in the musical context which I refer to as performance-participation type of learning. This method of learning stresses the importance of learning by doing or learning through acting in practice rather than learning of the activity in practice. You do not learn to perform, but learn as you perform since true knowing comes from actual doing. Saar (1999) makes a distinction between pedagogical framing (learning how to play music) and artistic/musical framing (playing music). It is only by participating in the practice that one learns the practice.

Schon (1983) distinguishes between educational institution where knowledge is taught and practical setting where knowledge is applied. The practical setting here would apply to the method of learning in traditional setting. According to Schon (ibid) educational institutions are often organized after the hierarchy of professional knowledge where the general principles occupy the highest level and concrete problem solving the lowest. In contrast, in apprenticeship learning, the learning happens by using skills in a real-life situation. Learning is not monopolized but shared and the learners acquire skills not only from the teacher but also from the other apprentice through comparative display of skills and ideas in the context of performance.

Learning by performance is evaluated through musical performance during weekly concerts. This encourages a transparent musical culture where students critique each other's performance. Performing during concerts offers the students the opportunity to try out their skills in a real life setting and be evaluated by the audience. The performer learns and perfect his/her skill through such evaluations and by extension improves their presentational skills.

Performance-composition techniques which involves creating and recreating music in the context of performance as promoted by the event or occasion (Nzewi: 1991) also falls in this method of learning. The end product in this case is a shared experience produced from a collaborative effort making the product a communal property rather than individuals. This method of learning composition provides a conducive atmosphere where the learners correct themselves in the cause of creating a piece of music and compare their ideas as they continue the process. The method of learning also gives the students an opportunity to try out their ideas and skills and receive feedback in terms of approval or non approval from the fellow learners. Learning therefore becomes an active process executed in the context of musical community of practice.

### **Recontextualisation strategy and process**

Once the music has been transferred to the classroom the teacher has the challenge of determining: what to learn about the music (the content of learning), how to learn (learning styles/process); when to learn what and under what circumstances and situations. Control of direction, development, space, and pace is given to the learner by the teacher. One thing that the teacher should take into consideration is that these graduates are not going to operate in a vacuum once they complete their training. They will need to go back and practice their musicianship in their communities in a bid to seek approval from their indigenous music counterparts. The Recontextualisation strategies and process used should therefore aim at making the learner fit into his/her community and his/her expertise be approved by the cultural practitioners. This is only possible if the cultural practitioners of music participate in the process of forming and informing (mentoring) the graduate so that the graduate is a product of both the teacher in the academy and the cultural music practitioner in the community.

The teacher should organize collaborative performance concerts between the students and the cultural practitioners of the music during cultural days in schools so that they learn from each other. This will encourage comparative display of skills and ideas between the two parties. It will also create partnership between the teachers in the academy and the artists who are the cultural practitioners of indigenous music. This will encourage transfer of skills and knowledge between the two settings and ensure retention of what is taught in terms of subsequent application in the learners' lives. The teachers in the academy should also organize workshops and invite master musicians from the community to facilitate and inculcate the right performing practice in the learners. Apart from having the master musician come to school, the students should also be given an opportunity to interact with the music in its cultural context by organizing fieldtrips to different communities.

In the case of dance, in order to relocated the dances to the cultural present for the students to generate contemporary meaning from their performance taking cognizance of the age difference of the performers, the

contemporary dance instructors should study the existing indigenous dances to establish the non-verbal cues that informed the dance vocabularies and movements with which indigenous choreographers created their work. This is only possible through interviewing the indigenous choreographers and observing and participating in the performance of the dances within their cultural contexts. By consulting and performing with the cultural practitioners a partnership is created through collaborative effort of the two parties. Since non-verbal cues and their meaning are culture bound, culturally appropriate non-verbal cues should then be used to communicate relevant and contemporary themes. Since the indigenous choreographers can identify with the cultural non-verbal cues, they bound to approve the dance.

Recontextualising and relocating indigenous music to the classroom setting involves recreating reformatting, repackaging and redefining the music to fit the demands of the new context. But we should not just end here. We must move further and reformulate the theories to accommodate the new practices and the redefined philosophies. In respect to song, we should not just transfer the sound (sonic) but also the humanizing aspects of the song that enables one to relate to and with the song. Transferring the sonic aspect of music alone to class is equal to transferring the shell and ignoring the beef (philosophical framework) that created the sounds hence compromising the sense and meaning in and of the song.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to discuss the strategies and modalities of refocusing indigenous music for formal classroom practice in a bid to create partnership between the school and the community. The paper advocates for learning through apprenticeship in the academy where the focus is on how the apprentice learns not only from the instructor who is a cultural practitioner but also from other apprentices through comparative display.

Unless indigenous music is recontextualised for classroom use in such a way that a bridge is built between the cultural practice and classroom demands so that the music can move to and from these two settings for future use by the learners, it will become a cultural thing that the learners do in their secondary education and after that it is dead and forgotten.

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