

## FIFTY NINE YEARS OF FORMAL MUSIC EDUCATION IN GHANAIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CHRONOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Music has played a very significant role in educating Ghanaian primary school children. From the colonial era till 1959, there were no curriculum document that guided teaching and learning of the art. What to teach and what to learn were left largely to the initiative and enthusiasm of individual teachers. The first ever syllabus for teaching the subject was published in 1959 by the Ghana Ministry of Education. Since then the music curriculum has gone through series of reviews and reforms, the last being the publication and implementation of the Creative Arts curriculum for primary schools in 2007. The aim of this paper is to present a brief chronology of fifty nine (59) years of implementation of formal music education in Ghanaian primary schools from 1959 to 2018.*

**KEYWORDS:** Formal Music Education, Curriculum Review, Primary School, Ghana.

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### INTRODUCTION

From 1959 till this year marks exactly fifty nine (59) years of implementation of formal music education in Ghanaian primary schools. Although teaching and learning of music prior to 1959 was not guided by any curriculum document, it played a very significant role in educating children. As basic school teachers between 1998 to 2001, and 2001 to 2007, we used music to conduct school morning assembly through singing, marching and drumming before classes began for the day. We employed it in our classrooms to expose students to aspects of their cultural practices, norms and values. We ensured that our interactions with students during music lessons reflected good practices in which “learners are able to make associations that are more meaningful than the learning of discrete items or skills” (Manford, 1996, p. 47). Currently, as generalist teacher educators, we have seen and observed both pre-service and in-service teachers using music in various ways in their classrooms during school visits to supervise pre-service teachers teaching practice, suggesting the pivotal role music continues to play in educating children.

The aim of this paper is to present a brief chronology of implementation of formal music education between 1959 and 2018 in Ghanaian primary schools.

### Before 1959

There are no written records to show the exact date or dates on which music education began in the Gold Coast, the name of this country (Ghana) before gaining political independence from Britain in 1957. However, evidence suggests that music formed part of activities in the Castle Schools (Flolu & Amuah, 2003). According to Flolu (1994), the colonial administration and the missionaries who had come from Europe established schools in the castles they had built to educate their children and those of their counterparts. As schools and missionary activities began to increase, the teaching of hymn singing and other Christian music based on existing

practice in Europe was added to the school curriculum in the form of class singing for school worship, and to train the native communities for participation in the liturgical processes of the church on Sundays (Flolu & Amuah, 2003).

Until 1959, there was no curriculum document that guided the teaching and learning of music in the primary schools (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; Flolu & Amuah, 2003), suggesting that “music teaching was left largely to the initiative and enthusiasm of individual teachers and varied from school to school or from area to area according to the impact of missionary activities (Flolu & Amuah, 2003, p.10). Until the middle of the twentieth century, singing continued to dominate music education in the primary schools and this phenomena was identified as a major weakness by the panel that designed and developed the first syllabus for teaching music in the primary schools (Flolu & Amuah, 2003).

### **The First Music Syllabus for Primary Schools**

The first ever syllabus for teaching and learning music in Ghanaian primary schools was published by the Ministry of Education in 1959 (Ampomah, 2001; Flolu & Amuah, 2003). According to Flolu (1994, p. 77), the aims of this curriculum document are:

- To develop the children’s appreciation for melodies and rhythmic patterns;
- To widen their field of musical enjoyment;
- To teach them some of the elements of musical grammar.

According to Flolu (1994), suitable activities were designed under four broad headings: Theory, Rhythmic Movement, Singing, and Appreciation for each primary school year. Flolu and Amuah (2003) argue that the same structure and objectives of the 1959 syllabus were pursued in the subsequent reviews of 1974 and 1976. Although these two syllabuses recognised the need for teaching and learning of indigenous Ghanaian music, this type had no place in classroom music activities and assessment of students’ knowledge and skills attainment in the art (Flolu & Amuah, 2003). They argued further:

An additional factor which contributes to the interest in singing is the annual choral music and cultural celebrations. In recent years the festivals have been expanded to include sight singing, poetry recitals, *atumpan* playing and drama. Despite these developments, and the current emphasis on indigenous Ghanaian music, to win a prize in choral music is the first ambition of every school (p. 21).

This phenomenon resulted in depriving many school going Ghanaian children of experiencing music of their tradition.

### **The Curriculum Enrichment Programme**

In an effort to promote the study and practice of indigenous musical arts in primary schools, the Ministry of Education launched the Curriculum Enrichment Programme (CEP) in 1985 (Flolu & Amuah, 2003). The specific aims as set out in the programme were to help the primary school pupils to “be proud of their country, appreciate and value their culture, feel the need to serve others and contribute towards the improvement of their environment, and be healthy and strong” (Flolu & Amuah 2003, p. 35). In implementing the CEP, traditional Ghanaian musical instruments such as the *atumpan* drum was used in place of the bell to summon the school community to official gathering. This is a reflection of indigenous community practice where

“drums are often used to transmit important messages; to rally people for communal work, to announce the death of some important personality, or to play appellations (Flolu & Amuah, 2003, p. 35-36).

### **The Cultural Studies Curriculum**

In spite of series of reviews and reforms to improve education in the primary schools, music continued to be dominated by singing until a new curriculum, the Cultural Studies came into effect as a result of yet another major educational reform in 1987 (Mereku & Ohene-Okantah, 2007). In the Cultural Studies programme, music and dance, drama and folklore, and religious knowledge were considered as the basic components of Ghanaian culture (Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD), 1987). However, the Ghana Music Teachers Association (GMTA) expressed their opposition to this new curriculum. It found the Cultural Studies curriculum as musically unchallenging, arguing that “music was going to be lost completely from the children’s education since the new discipline needed experts with three specialties (i.e. Music, Ghanaian Language and Religion) to be able to, effectively, teach its content” (Mereku & Ohene-Okantah, 2007, p. 28).

A further and continued advocacy against the Cultural Studies programme saw the setting up of a committee by the Ministry of Education in 1995 to review the programme (Mereku & Ohene-Okantah, 2007) which resulted in replacing the Cultural Studies with the Music and Dance curriculum (CRDD, 1998).

### **The Music and Dance Curriculum**

The new Music and Dance curriculum was implemented in 1998 (CRDD, 1998). The general aims as outlined in the syllabus are:

- To build a strong desire in children to continue to participate in the Performing Arts with imagination;
- To nurture in the students, the ability to perceive the expressive qualities of Music, Dance and Drama through critical listening and observing, improvising, composing, performing, appreciating and enjoying these art forms;
- To enable them to develop the initiative and understanding on one hand, and the desire and admiration on the other, for creativity and artistic activities in general and in the Performing Arts in particular.

The content of the syllabus reflects children behaviour and attitude to music making. This is considered as a significant breakthrough, suggesting that prominence was given to practical approach to teaching and learning music. Meanwhile, the GMTA expressed dissatisfaction about the introduction of traditional Western notation system in the Junior Secondary School, considering this as “unnecessarily delayed” (Flolu & Amuah, 2003, p. 45), preferring for an earlier introduction of the notation system in the primary school.

The Music and Dance curriculum was in use until the entire educational system was reviewed again in 2007, given birth a new curriculum called the Creative Arts.

## The Creative Arts Curriculum

The reform of the entire educational system and implementation of new curriculums across all subjects in 2007 was aimed at improving the educational system's responsiveness to current social, economic and cultural challenges (CRDD, 2007; White Paper on the Report of the Educational reform Review Committee, 2004). As a result of this reform, music became one strand of the Creative Arts curriculum for primary schools. This curriculum consists of the Performing Arts (Music, Dance, and Drama), Visual Arts, and Sewing. The Performing Arts is designed for teaching traditional Ghanaian music with an integration of dance and drama through composition, performance, and listening and observation. The general aims of teaching music as part of the performing arts are to help primary school pupils to:

- To think critically and imaginatively;
- Make, re-create and discover knowledge and learning;
- Develop practical skills and different modes of thinking;
- Acquire skills to analyse and evaluate creative works and to recognize their personal aesthetic tastes as well as those of others;
- Develop human and moral values such as tolerance, sharing, helping, concentration, discipline, self-confidence, honesty, self-awareness, self-expression, teamwork and sense of judgment (CRDD, 2007).

The Creative Arts curriculum is still in use, guiding music education in primary schools.

## Challenges

Notwithstanding the content of the music aspect of the Creative Arts curriculum reflection on Ghanaian children musical attitude, research has revealed some challenges affecting its formal teaching and learning. Opoku-Asare et al. (2015) and Bofo-Agyemang (2010) observed that the Creative Arts including music are taught by primary school teachers who lack adequate knowledge and skills about the implementation of the curriculum. In his research with the aim of assisting pre-service teachers to teach the performing arts, Adjepong (2018) identified expression of fear and lack of knowledge and skills by pre-service teachers to teach during their teaching practice in classroom setting. Amuah and Adum-Attah (2016), stated that "one of the major problems confronting the teaching of the subject is that teachers lack skills required for teaching of materials in the syllabus" (p. 72). Other identified challenge is substituting pupils' attitude of sound exploration with imposition on them, adult musical values (Dzansi, 2004; Flolu, 1993).

Lack of adequate knowledge, skills and understanding in music, therefore, appear to be the major challenge confronting majority of teachers in providing learning experiences for pupils in the primary schools.

## The Way Forward

The presentation made so far reveals that formal music education in Ghanaian primary schools has been and continues to be in a dilemma which needs a pragmatic solution. Flolu suggested in 1993 for the adoption of "radical but essentially *artistic* and *musicianly* attitude" (p. 119) to tackle the problems confronting music education in Ghanaian basic schools. We know from

experiences, some attempts that have been made to find solutions to the challenges but perhaps, Flolu's stance is of more significant today. It is important for music educators in Colleges of Education and in the various Universities to collaborate to devise ways and means to plan and implement series of workshops and in-service training to build the capacity of primary school teachers to teach music more effectively in their classrooms. As noted by Flolu (1993), the time "to widen our search for more concrete solutions" (p. 119) is now. Such training workshops coming into fruition will surely contribute significantly to effective music education in Ghanaian primary schools.

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