

*Cultural Diversity: Indigenous Ghanaian Music in the Curriculum of a Higher
Institution in Ghana.*

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Abstract

Ghana is one of the countries committed to the promotion of intercultural understanding. The pioneering work of Nketia has contributed immensely to the accumulation and transmission of knowledge and skills in Ghanaian indigenous music. Though the study of indigenous Ghanaian music has been included in the curriculum of the University of Ghana, much is left to be desired on account of the scope and depth of indigenous music programmes. One of the problems

confronting the University of Ghana is lack of staff to take critical positions in the implementation of the indigenous music programmes. Lack of commitment on the part of academics in the field of music, in Ghana, has contributed to this deficiency.

The University of Ghana would have to be committed to the design and implementation of Ghanaian indigenous music programme with the depth and breadth required of any subject taught at the university level. Undergraduate programmes in music should be redesigned as "two-track" programmes -Western music and African music tracks. Graduate programmes in indigenous Ghanaian and African music should be pursued vigorously.

Introduction

Cultural diversity has, in the 21st Century, been the center of attention of stakeholders of education throughout the world. In, *Education and Cultural Diversity*, published by UNESCO in 2002, John Daniel notes "cultural diversity is a perspective that permeates much of UNESCO's thinking on education and that frames many of the activities that seek to promote in and with Member States" (p. 1). This statement echoes the pronouncement made by the 33rd Session of the General Conference of UNESCO when, it affirmed "cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity" (UNESCO, 2005) and that it needed to be cherished, nurtured and promoted. UNESCO refers to cultural diversity as "the manifold ways in which the cultures of groups and societies find expression. These expressions are passed on within and among groups and societies" (UNESCO, 2005). Contrary to the thinking that characterised the actions of colonial powers and Christian Missionaries that operated in Africa in the 18th and the 19th Centuries (indigenous cultural suppression, divide and rule), world leaders of today have appreciated the value of cultural diversity and offered support for its promotion and management.

The need to forge mutual understanding among people with diverse cultures in Ghana has never become so urgent than in the 21st Century. Intercultural understanding will foster unity and promote, in Ghana, the much-needed development. Though efforts have been expended in the search for strategies to promote peaceful coexistence among people of diverse cultures, the problem of lack of understanding of cultures other than one's own still plagues Ghanaians as well as citizens of other countries in Africa. Many scholars and politicians have suggested a *multi-prong* approach to the promotion of peaceful coexistence among people of diverse cultures. Nketia (2003) and others have argued for the critical role education can play in intercultural understanding (Daniel 2007; Campbell 2004; Nketia, 2003). With reference to the benefit of intercultural understanding Nketia (2003) notes that:

There is no better way of helping people come to grips with cultural diversity in a meaningful and practical way than through a programme that makes the best in the cultural traditions of humanity accessible to all. I am particularly gratified by this opportunity for communities to share their cultural treasures with the wider world as they find ways of sustaining them not only for themselves but for the benefit of humanity (2003).

Nketia's role in the study of diverse cultures, through music, in Ghana and for that matter Africa cannot be underrated. In 1952 and 1959, he designed and taught courses in ethnomusicology in the Department of Sociology and the Department of Archeology respectively. After nine years of foundational work Nketia established an ethnomusicology unit at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, in 1961, with the view to researching and assembling materials on Ghanaian indigenous music.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the status of the study of indigenous Ghanaian/African music in the University of Ghana. The focus of attention of the paper is on the factors that have

shaped the content of the curriculum and influenced the implementation of indigenous music programmes within a culturally diversified society like Ghana.

Interethnic relations and music practice

The coexistence of different ethnic groups within one social unit is as old a phenomenon as the genesis of human migration from one place to the other. Though the phenomenon of cultural diversity, in contemporary times, seems to be prevalent in developed countries in Europe and North America, it has, for many years, existed in other parts of the world including countries in Africa. For instance, Ghana, with a population of 20 million, is organised along linguistic and ethnic lines and scholars have observed that each of her 25 major languages constitutes a language area and for that matter an ethnic group with unique cultural characteristics (Nukunya, 1992). A few of these ethnic groups are the *Akan, Ga, Ewe, Ada, Larteh*, in the south and *Dagomba, Dagaare, Kussasi* in the North.

Each group in Ghana has created and performed indigenous musical types, which, *inter alia*, serve as cultural identity for the group (Agawu, 2003). Most of these musical types resisted the 19th Century Christian missionary suppression, survived the test of time and are relevant to the musical culture of contemporary Ghana (Flolu and Amuah, 2003). Not only are the colourful pageantry of (the proliferation of festivals, enacted in 21st Century Ghana, loaded with music and dance events, but indigenous music also permeates religious, social and political lives of the people. Though the indigenous music and dance types of each of the 25 major ethnic groups are unique, structurally, there are similarities in the functional role played by music and dance among the ethnic groups. For instance, the Akan, one of the major ethnic groups in Ghana, regards music as an integral part of the elaborate funeral ceremonies organised for the dead. In

the same vein, the Ewe, Dagaaba and the Dagbon people as well as the Nzemas and the Ahantas would not consider their funeral ceremonies as complete if the latter are devoid of music.

It is worthy to note that each group in Ghana has not less than two indigenous musical types and these are organized around social institutions of the community (Nketia, 1974). Among the Akans, for instance, musical types like *fontomfrom*, *mpintin*, *adowa*, *asaudua*, *sikiyi*, *dansuom*, *niahara*, *asafo*, *adzewa*, *apatampa*, *adakam*, *kundum*, to mention a few, are performed. In the repertoire of Ewe musical culture are *atsiagbekor*, *agbadza*, *adevu*, *avihao*, *boboobo*, *kenka*, *yeve* and Akplu's music. Among the Dagbon are musical types like *damba*, *takai*, *bambaya*, to mention a few. This list (from three out of 25 ethnic groups) is indicative of the magnitude of musical types that exists in Ghana. The proliferation of indigenous musical types poses a considerable challenge relative to the development of the content of a curriculum intended for the study of indigenous music in Ghana. Notwithstanding, Ghana cannot afford but to submit to the commitment of ensuring cultural understanding, through comprehensive educational programmes that expose her citizenry to the diverse musical cultures that exist in the country.

Revisionist philosophies in education

Post-independence Ghana was a fertile ground for the propagation of the ideology of "African personality" with its attendant philosophy of "*sankofaism*." Agawu (2003) notes, "traditional culture was understood as a rebirth through a kind of *Sankofa* ('go back and retrieve') philosophy" (p. 19). Beginning in the 1960s the Government of Ghana has expended efforts to restore confidence in the Ghanaian and to enable him/her to value and promote indigenous Ghanaian culture. Through the Ministry of Education, the Government of Ghana has supported

programmes that promoted Ghanaian indigenous cultural values considered non-inimical to social development. It was within this context of cultural revivalism that the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana was established in 1961, The Institute supported research work in the documentation of Ghanaian indigenous music spearheaded by Nketia. As already noted, Nketia's work, as an ethnomusicologist, at the University of Ghana assisted him to reach his goal of sharing indigenous Ghanaian musical culture with the rest of the world. He notes:

Apart from being an interesting academic discipline, ethnomusicology has an important task, indeed an important mission in Ghana—that of providing a body of musical knowledge that can be drawn on as much by artists—composers, performers, dancers, producers—as by scholars and educators who have to plan educational programmes and collect and arrange curricula materials for the teaching of African music. It is to ethnomusicology that we have to look for a systematic theory of African music that will reflect the basic principles that underline traditional musical practice (Nketia, 1970, p. 10).

By 1962, Nketia had prepared the ground for the establishment of a School of Music and Drama. The accumulation of research materials on indigenous Ghanaian music served as the foundation for the stimulation of new areas of research, creative work and teaching of African music and related arts (Nketia, 1970). Two music programmes were run by the School, namely, General Diploma in Music and Diploma in African Music (see Figure 1). The General Diploma in Music program was structured on the lines of what pertained at the Prince of Wales College, Achimota, Ghana. The College which was the first 2nd-cycle institution established in Ghana by the colonial Government offered music as a subject. The content of the music curriculum, at the Prince of Wales College, was focused entirely on the study of the theory and practice of Western music with the study of African music at the periphery of the program. The General Diploma in Music program was a reflection of the music program implemented at the Prince of Wales College.

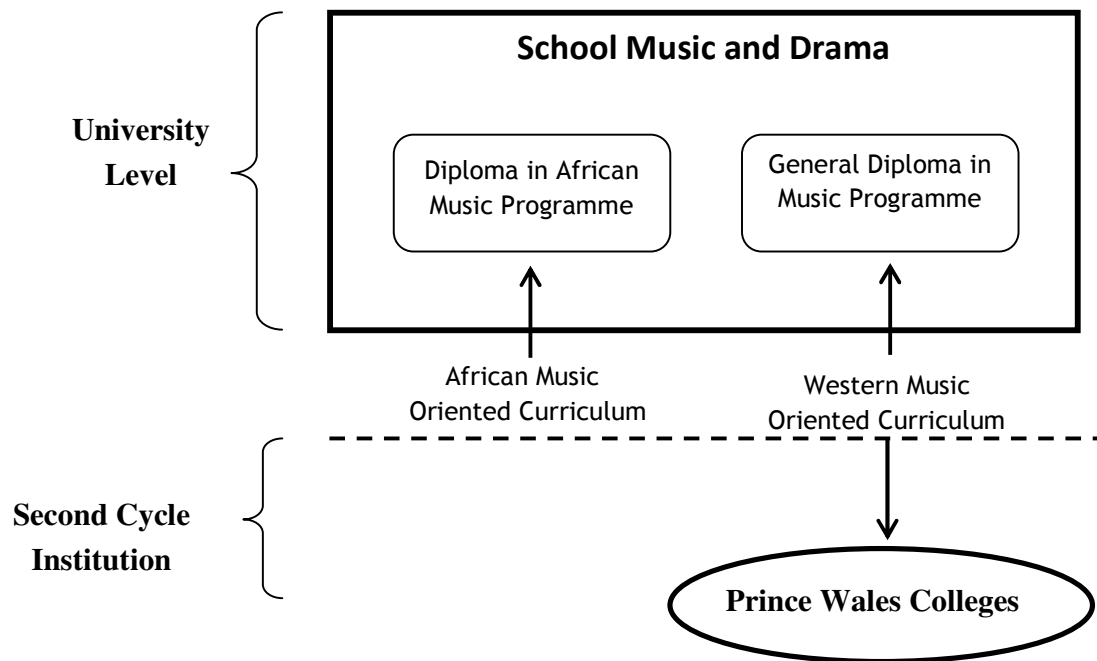


Figure 1: Music Programmes in the School of Music and Drama

On the other hand, the two-year Diploma in African Music program was designed for the study of African music with emphasis on the theory and practice of Ghanaian indigenous music (Nketia, 1970). A critical component of this program was the study of one or two indigenous instruments to an appreciable standard.

Developing a meaningful standard of diversity within programmes

According to Nketia (1970) any meaningful study of a musical culture should begin with the study of the music performance practice of that culture. He avers that the study of an instrument "as a cultural activity has a meaning beyond structure and the ethnomusicologist

enriches his understanding of meaning by going beyond formal analysis" (Nketia, 2005, p. 27). This assertion has been supported by Saighoe (1988) whose skills in the playing of gyil (xylophone) enhanced his study of the xylophone musical tradition of the Dagaba of the Upper West Region of Ghana. Not only will the performance practice enable the student to understand the structural principles underscoring the musical tradition under study, but also exposes him/her to the contextual information available only when one engages in the performance practice of the musical tradition. The Diploma in African Music programme, therefore, required students to acquire proficiency in the performance on one or two Ghanaian indigenous instrument before graduation. This requirement makes the problem of musical type selection more compelling. As already stated, the proliferation of indigenous musical types presented a problem in the development of the content of a curriculum for the study of Ghanaian indigenous music. This problem was resolved through the efforts of the Arts Council of Ghana which was established in 1960. The Council in discharging its duties formed the National Dance Ensemble and also supervised "the formation across the country of many so-called cultural troupes" (Agawu, 2003, p. 19). Agawu (2003) further notes:

These associations brought together drummers, singers, and dancers from different ethnic groups to learn and perform their most popular or most prominent dances (including *Kpanlogo, Adowa, Atsiagbekor, Bawa, and Damba-Takai*). The result would be the establishment of a transethnic canon, a classic collection of cultural artifacts... The idea was to preserve the authenticity of each dance by reifying certain dance steps, body movements, costumes, and styles of singing and drumming (p. 19).

Nketia (1970) has confirmed that the musical types selected for study in the Diploma in African Music programme included selections made by the Arts Council of Ghana. He codified the musical types and referred to them as the canons of Ghanaian indigenous musical types. The canonized musical types were often performed musical types from the major musical cultures in

Ghana, some of which were *adowa, fontomfrom, siki, atsiagbekor, agbadza, boboobo, kenka, kpanlogo, asafo, adzewa, adenkum, bambaya, benva, takai, toraandnagila*.

Recruitment and retention of qualified staff/artistes

Another challenge for the Diploma in African Music programme was the recruitment of staff to teach and research in the area of instrumental performance. To implement this critical component of the African music programme there was the need to employ pre-literate experts in the tradition to the teaching staff position in the University. Most of these experts could not read and write the English language. From Nketia's (1970) comments it could be inferred that the University of Ghana was reluctant to bend the rules and maintained her position as regards the employment of staff to teaching positions. Nketia's (1970) states,

For the past six years, there has always been a resident master drummer from Ghana at the University of California, Los Angeles, whose job is to assist in the training programme of the Institute of Ethnomusicology for students interested in Africa as a musical area. Wesleyan University at Connecticut has similarly started a programme in African music and dance a master drummer and a dance teacher from the Institute of African Studies [Ghana] are assisting in the running of this programme.

Such appointments may seem difficult for African Universities to make, for I suppose they would like to wait for competent drummers with Ph.D. degrees to emerge from the blue. Although we have got round this problem in Ghana, I am sure that not every one in Legon(*University of Ghana*) has adjusted his mind to the fact that the best exponents of the arts of Africa belong to pre-literate Africa (p. 8).

As noted from Nketia's comment, he succeeded in convincing the University authorities to employ performing artistes, who were well versed in the traditions they represented, to teach students in the School of Music and Drama. This policy has been emulated by departments of music in other universities in Ghana. Unfortunately, the University of Ghana has not been able to produce master instrumentalists who are skilful in the playing of indigenous instruments after 46 years of offering courses in indigenous music. The University continues to rely on illiterate

indigenous instrumentalists though these artistes find it difficult to teach in the academy—they lack the pedagogical skills needed to teach university students.

Many factors account for the non-existence of graduate professional instrumentalists, with requisite skills, to teach indigenous instruments. Lack of commitment on the part of lecturers teaching in the Department of Music may contribute to this deficiency. A cursory review of the music programmes implemented in the department of music, the University of Ghana, indicates overemphasis on the teaching of Western instrumental playing. Inadvertently, lectures' behaviour and attitude show signs of their strong belief in the study of Western musical instruments. Again, one is tempted to state that the inability of the University of Ghana to train indigenous instrumentalists may have resulted from the lack of confidence on the part of the lecturers to design and implement programmes in the study of indigenous music. Most music lecturers in Ghana are so grounded in the study of Western musical traditions, including the playing of Western instruments that they have the propensity to perpetuate the traditions, both theory and practice, of Western music. In institutions where indigenous instruments are studied, it could be observed that the standards are so low that most graduates who studied indigenous musical instruments lack the requisite skills to enable them participate in public performances. To date, the University of Ghana has not offered postgraduate courses in indigenous instrumental music playing. Another problem that has contributed to the non-existence of teachers of indigenous instrumental practice is that students do not avail themselves for the study of indigenous musical instruments. Students' enthusiasm for the study of indigenous instruments is extremely low. They would prefer studying Western musical instruments to indigenous instruments because they were encouraged to do so by their teachers.

Name changes reflect shifts in philosophical orientation at higher institutions

In 1967 the University of Ghana expanded the scope of the School of Music and Drama and renamed it the School of Performing Arts. The Department of Music, one of the three departments in the School, expanded its programme to include undergraduate study of music that covered the theory and practice of both Western and African music. The four-year undergraduate programme mounted during the 2007/2008 academic year included 44 core and elective courses; only seven of the courses cover the study of indigenous African music. This trend is evident in other universities. For instance, a study of the programme mounted by the Department of Music and Performing Arts Education, University of Education, Winneba included 46 courses five of which focused on the study of African indigenous music. Similarly, the programme mounted by the Department of Music and Theatre Studies at the University of Cape Coast consisted of 54 courses with 5 focusing on the study of African indigenous music.

Graduate programmes mounted at the Department of Music, University of Ghana, included ethnomusicology (concentration on the study of Ghanaian indigenous music) as well as theory and composition. The Department has since the inception of the post graduate programme in African Music produced quite a number of ethnomusicology scholars in the field of African Music.

The pioneering work towards the promotion of the study of Ghanaian indigenous music initiated and popularised by the University of Ghana needs to be recognised and commended. Departments of Music in other Universities in Ghana emulated and expanded on the programme initiated by the School of Music and Drama (later School of Performing Arts), University of Ghana, Legon.

Conclusion

Cultural diversity has been recognised and given prominence in world discourse in the 21st Century. With the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001, UNESCO was poised for action for the protection and propagation of diverse cultures in the world. Music education practitioners are leaving no stone unturned as they search for information and strategies for the dissemination of knowledge and skills related to diverse musical cultures of the world. Ghana, with 25 unique ethnic groups, is one of the countries committed to the promotion of intercultural understanding. The pioneering work of Nketia has contributed immensely to the accumulation and transmission of knowledge and skills in Ghanaian indigenous music. Though the study of indigenous Ghanaian music has been included in the curriculum of the Department of Music, University of Ghana, much is left to be desired on account of the scope and depth of indigenous music programmes. One of the problems confronting the University of Ghana regarding the intensive study of Ghanaian indigenous music is lack of staff to take critical positions in the implementation of the indigenous music programs. After 40 years of research and sharing knowledge and skills in Ghanaian indigenous music, the University of Ghana has not been able to produce indigenous instrumentalists with the requisite academic qualifications to teach indigenous instruments. Lack of commitment on the part of academics in the field of music, in Ghana, has contributed to this deficiency. Students are also not motivated enough to opt for the study of Ghanaian indigenous music.

To contribute meaningfully towards the propagation of indigenous culture, the University of Ghana would have to heighten its commitment to the design and implementation of Ghanaian indigenous music program with the depth and breadth required of any subject taught at the university level. The training of staff to teach Ghanaian and, for that matter, African music

should be vigorously pursued. In this light, I would like to suggest that the Diploma in African Music programme should be revived and offered in all the universities in Ghana. Undergraduate programmes in music should be redesigned as a "two-track" programme—Western music and African music tracks. The African music component should be well resourced and supported. Even students who opt for the Western music track should be exposed to the basics of Ghanaian indigenous music. Graduate programmes in indigenous Ghanaian and African music should be pursued vigorously. The need to initiate a graduate program in Ghanaian indigenous music performance should be considered compelling and action taken immediately.

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