

Centering on **African Practice**
in **Musical Arts Education**

Minette Mans



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Factors associated with academic performance of students in music at NCE level: A case study of Oyo State College of Education, Oyo, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates factors associated with music students' academic performance at NCE level using Oyo State College of Education, Oyo, as case study. Purposive sampling procedure was used to administer a questionnaire to all final-year music students. Interview sessions were also held with the educators in the department. The questionnaires were analysed using simple percentage and Spearman's rank correlation method. The result of the statistical analyses showed that students' interest in music, followed by parental influence, correlated with students' performance in music. The outcome of the teachers' interviews revealed the problems of inadequate staffing, poor infrastructure as well as the problem of lack of interest as factors associated with poor academic performance of students. Review of entry requirements as a means of selecting students based on their interest in music, adequate funding, staffing and personnel capacity-building were some of the suggestions made to provide the much-desired enabling environment for learning.

Key words: teacher education, Nigeria, attitudes, academic performance, research

INTRODUCTION

The position of education in national development has received considerable attention in academic circles in recent years. The prestigious place accorded education is more pronounced in developed countries where it is argued that heavy investments in education have a great potential for enhancing rapid economic growth (Longe, 1981). All indicators point to education as one of the key factors in economic development and political emancipation.

Nigeria's National Policy on Education states that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 1998). In other words, the teacher's responsibility is most crucial to the successful implementation of any education programme and therefore a determining factor in national development issues at large. The role of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) graduates to the success or otherwise of this present government's educational policies – Universal Basic Education (UBE) – is crucial. This is so because these NCE graduates constitute a large percentage of primary and junior secondary school teachers saddled with the responsibility for laying the foundation of every child's education in Nigeria.

Colleges of Education in Nigeria have the responsibility of training and equipping their students and awarding them the National Certificate in Education (NCE), which is meant to become the minimum entry qualification into the teaching profession.

The study of music is indispensable for the development of the Nigerian child, society and the entire nation. Musical arts education has benefits in the areas of vocational, intellectual, emotional, physical and social development of the learner (Nwadukwe, 1995). Okafor (1988) also states that the general aim of music education is to equip the individual to perform music in the society and to contribute to the economy. In society, music serves social, political, historical, economic, religious, communicative and moral functions. As a result, no stone should be left unturned in ensuring relevant, qualitative musical arts education. This means adequate training of the trainers so that they can effectively discharge their duties at the end of their studies, as well as meet the society's needs and expectations.

The questions emanating from the foregoing therefore are: how equipped are the graduates of NCE music education to practise, or how prepared are they to face the challenges beyond the NCE programme? These questions stem from the fact that despite the crucial roles music teachers have to play to uphold the highlighted roles of musical arts education in the individual and society as a whole, ongoing poor performance of students at the NCE level has been observed over the years. Available information obtained from the two Colleges of Education situated in Oyo State, show that in the last ten years, at least one-third of the students failed every year. The main causes and underlying factors responsible for the failure must be understood if effective and well-focused interventions are to be designed to ameliorate the present situation.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors associated with music students' performance in music at NCE level, using Oyo State College of Education, Oyo, as a case study.

RESEARCH METHOD

Questionnaires were administered to all the final year music students (41) during the 2003/2004 session. Final year students were selected as the respondents because their responses are more likely to represent their true opinions on the relevant issues after three and half years of coursework in music education. An in-depth interview guide was also prepared for music instructors and lecturers to elicit qualitative information to serve as a complement to the quantitative data obtained from the students' questionnaires. A questionnaire was drawn up to collect information from the students. Questions were posed to investigate several variables including students' personal characteristics, academic performance, interest in music, attitude to study and perception of music as a course of study. Other questions included parental influence on respondents' choice of music (as a course of study at NCE level), as well as the respondents' perception of lecturers, instructors and facilities as being related to their academic performance.

Questionnaire data was captured and analysed using the Statistical

Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for Windows version 10.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) were determined. For the inferential statistics, academic performance is the dependent variable, while all others are independent variables, hypothesised and tested as factors affecting academic performance of students. The independent variables were scored through the simple accumulation of scores assigned to individual questions measuring each of the independent variables. Mean scores were calculated and then correlated with academic performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive characteristics of students

Most of the students (87.80%) were between the ages of 21 and 26, while none possessed a qualification higher than Senior Secondary School Certificate of Education (SSCE). In addition, 75.61% of the respondents had no previous knowledge of music, prior to their admission for the NCE programme. However, all respondents (100%) passed through the preliminary class before commencing the NCE programme proper. It is interesting to note that 39 of the students (95.12%) believed the preliminary class gave them a good musical grounding.

Factors affecting academic performance

Parental influence

The influence of parents on respondents' choice of music as a course of study was investigated. While 3 of the students claimed that they were forced to study music against their wishes, results revealed that 20 of the respondents (48.78%) had their parents' encouragement to study music, while the same number of respondents did not necessarily have their parents' influence to study the course. Only 1 respondent (2.44%) was undecided on the question.

Students' interest in music

As shown in Table 1 below, for most students (70.73%), music was not their first choice. For those who made music their first choice, fewer than half did so because of their interest. In all, only 18 (43.90%) of all the students hope to continue with music as a career after graduation.

Table 1: Students' interest in music

I was offered music because I could not secure admission to study the course of my choice		
	Frequency	%
Yes	29	70.7
No	12	29.3
Total	41	100.0
I chose music because of my interest in it		
	Frequency	%
Yes	19	46.3
No	22	53.7
Total	41	100.0
I hope to continue with music as a career after obtaining my NCE certificate		
	Frequency	%
Yes	18	43.9
No	23	56.1
Total	41	100.0

Facilities

Respondents were asked to assess the adequacy of facilities at their disposal for learning, such as musical instruments, a college library and music textbooks. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Facilities for learning

The music department is adequately equipped with functional musical instruments		
	Frequency	%
Yes	0	0
No	41	100.00
Total	41	100.00
College library is adequately equipped with modern and relevant textbooks		
	Frequency	%
Yes	1	2.4
No	40	97.6
Total	41	100.00
Music textbooks are expensive and scarce		
	Frequency	%
Yes	34	82.9
No	7	17.1
Total	41	100.00

Lecturers and instructors

The students’ perception of their teachers is that their lecturers and instructors were hardworking (agreed by 95.1%). However, most (80.5%) said they did not have enough time to teach practical lessons. Nine students (22%) said their lecturers/instructors frequently absent themselves from school.

Perception of music as a course of study

The perception of music as a course of study came in two divergent opinions as almost equal numbers of the respondents agreed or disagreed that music is a difficult course. However, most of them disagreed that only the talented ones do well in music.

Students’ attitude to work

Students’ attitude towards work or study of music was examined through a set of five questions. The findings are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Students' attitude to work

I do not practise on my musical instruments as I ought to		
	Frequency	%
Agree	29	70.73
Disagree	11	26.83
Undecided	1	2.44
Total	41	100.00
I don't always do my assignments and practise on my own		
	Frequency	%
Agree	3	7.32
Disagree	36	87.80
Undecided	2	4.88
Total	41	100.00
I easily get carried away in music class		
	Frequency	%
Agree	3	7.32
Disagree	38	92.68
Undecided	–	–
Total	41	100.00
I sometimes come late to class		
	Frequency	%
Agree	4	9.76
Disagree	35	85.36
Undecided	2	4.88
Total	41	100.00
I do not attend music classes regularly		
	Frequency	%
Agree	1	2.44
Disagree	40	97.56
Undecided	–	–
Total	41	100.00

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN MUSIC

The actual academic performance of the students, as indicated by their present Grade Point Average (GPA) in music courses only, was obtained from the questionnaire responses and cross-checked with college records. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Respondents' present grade point average (GPA) in music

GPA	Frequency	%
Distinction (4.50 – above)	–	–
Credit (3.50 – 4.49)	6	14.63
Upper merit (2.50 – 3.49)	16	39.02
Lower merit (1.50 – 2.49)	17	41.46
Pass (1.00 – 1.49)	2	4.88
Fail (below 1.00)	–	–
Total	41	100.00

Inferential statistics

Calculation of scores for independent variables

All the questionnaire items were coded, while the questions measuring the independent variables (factors affecting performance of students) were scored, and the mean scores calculated. The results are shown in Table 5.

Correlation

Spearman's Rank Correlation method was used to show the relationship between the independent variables (the scores as calculated above) and the dependent variable, which is academic performance (students' cumulative grade point average in music courses). The relationship is shown in Table 6, and discussed subsequently.

Table 5: Independent variable scores

	Number of students	Maximum score attainable	Aggregate mean scores	Standard deviation
Parental influence score	41	4	3.4390	0.5024
Interest score	41	6	4.1951	1.2494
Facilities score	41	5	4.1707	0.3809
Perception score	41	4	2.7561	1.4453
Students' attitude score	41	10	8.6341	1.2798

Table 6: Correlation between factors affecting performance and academic performance

Students' academic performance	Students' perception
	0.167
	P = 0.296
	Parental influence
	0.355*
	P = 0.023
	Students' interest in music
	0.426**
	P = 0.005
	Students' attitude towards work
0.081	
P = 0.614	

N=41

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

From the study, the following findings emerged:

- a) Students' interest in music had moderate, but highly significant positive correlation with academic performance. This means that the greater the student's interest in music, the better his/her performance. In this regard, Nwadukwe (1995) noted that lack of interest or insufficient motivation limited the student's capacity to learn, just as Abdullahi (1996) finds that students' interest as revealed in habit patterns contributed to their poor performance. A second factor was also found to be moderately correlated with students' poor performance but not as strong as the association with students' interest in music as explained above. This is the parental influence variable, that is, students having parents or guardians who encouraged or allowed them to choose music as a career were more likely to perform better academically.
- b) The remaining variables – age, previous knowledge in music, present educational qualification, adequacy of facilities, lecturers' /instructors' role, as well as students' perception of music and attitude to work, did not have any significant correlation at the 0.05 level. Passing through the preliminary class did not seem to influence performance of students although as mentioned earlier, most of them were of the opinion that it gave them a good music background. This raises fundamental questions about the desired versus actual impact of the preliminary class on the music students at the NCE level.

From the foregoing, the factors that are more important to academic performance have to do with students' interest in music; this in turn affects their attitude to work and, ultimately, performance. This is substantiated by the results that showed that most of the students did not default in the obligatory and monitored aspects of their study such as regularity and punctuality in the class, or doing assignments. Conversely, practising privately outside the usual coursework (and which is largely a function of individual interest) was not done as seriously as it ought to be. Since "practice makes perfect", this factor made a foremost difference in the achievement of each student.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH LECTURERS/INSTRUCTORS

In-depth interview sessions were conducted with the six members of staff (the investigator being the seventh) of the department. Questions were asked to probe into teachers' perception of reasons behind students' performance.

In the opinion of the lecturers, the most important reason for poor performance was that the department was grossly understaffed. As such, the workload for the existing staff was too much. They did not have enough time for the students. Secondly, the department was underfunded. Thus, it lacked musical instruments, laboratories, music literature and other necessary facilities. This greatly affected both the teaching and learning processes. Thirdly, there was a perceived lack of interest on the part of the students and consequent apathy towards music education. The teachers' consensus was that a student who has an appreciable level of interest in music is likely to perform well in spite of the inadequacies of infrastructure in the department.

This qualitative information from the teachers seems to point more to staffing and funding as the major cause of poor performance among students. This is in agreement with the observations of Kehinde (2000) who noted that poor funding has resulted in the non-prioritisation of music programmes in the colleges of education in the country. Ekwueme (2000) sees poor or lack of funding as a sign of government's negative regard for the music profession. She further identified the lack of a policy statement by the government, which would have assisted in determining the philosophy, goals, standards and quality of music at every level of education. Comparing Nigeria's combined higher institutions' music offering, with the music education programme in the Indiana University as described by Wechsler (as far back as 1980), we cannot but conclude that ours is a pitiful situation. Wechsler (1980) mentions facilities that included six buildings containing classrooms, practice rooms, faculty offices and studies, rehearsal rooms and space as well as equipment for recitals, concerts, and full-scale opera and ballet productions. Wechsler further remarked that there were more than 550 pianos, among other instructional facilities, serviced by five resident piano technicians.

Statistical analyses showed that lack of infrastructure in the department had no significant correlation with the academic performance of music students. Divergent as this looks from the lecturers' submission, there seems to be a meeting point. The lecturers believe that even in a situation of adequate staff, funding and facilities, a student with genuine interest stands to gain a lot from the lecturers and would therefore perform well. This corroborates the statistical inference that more rests with the student's interest.

There was a consensus among all the lecturers and instructors that the mandatory audition test administered by the departmental board of studies on every applicant in the past, but no longer in the last few years, is a possible factor responsible for students' incessant failure. The department therefore has no way of determining each applicant's aptitude and is therefore compelled to admit any qualified applicant based on the general entry requirements. Consequently, the situation has gradually degenerated. They further opined that a revival of the audition test, as is the standard practice in some renowned institutions at home and abroad, would bring a turnaround of matters in the department.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ameliorate the problems highlighted in this study, the following recommendations are made.

Audition tests should be re-activated by the music department as part of the entry requirements for fresh intakes. It would assist in separating "the chaff from the wheat" by ensuring that only genuinely capable candidates are admitted for the programme.

There is the urgent need to fortify the numerical strength of the personnel to meet the minimum standard set by the NCCE. Therefore, well-qualified lecturers, as well as professional and competent instructors to handle tutorial classes, should be employed. Considering the population of students, more staff are needed to ensure a better quality education.

There should be opportunities to motivate lecturers and instructors whose responsibility it is to run the programme, by encouraging and sponsoring

them to attend conferences and workshops to further improve their effectiveness. The lecturers and instructors on their part, need to keep abreast with modern teaching methods and improve their knowledge through acquisition of higher degrees.

Provision of adequate facilities by the college authority and the government is a crucial step towards providing an enabling environment for learning. Some of the required facilities include a well-equipped and functional music complex, which can house eight to ten practice cubicles (properly sound proofed), each with a piano or portable electronic keyboard for students' private practice sessions. The minimum standard as required by the National Commission for Colleges of Education should at least be met, if not surpassed.

Procurement of both Western and traditional instruments for music departments is imperative, while the need to equip both the main and departmental libraries with relevant and updated music textbooks, journals and other printed materials cannot be overemphasised. The government has the responsibility to provide these services. We therefore wish to stress that the time has come to stop paying lip service to the issue of qualitative music education in this country. If indeed it is true that education in Nigeria is no longer a private enterprise but a huge government venture that has witnessed a progressive and dynamic intervention and active participation (FRN, 1998), then the government must back up her statement with positive action by making a huge investment in education as contained in her policy.

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