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The Roles Of The Choral Music Directors In The Teaching And Learning Of Choral Music In Port Harcourt

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the role of choral music directors in teaching and learning of choral music. The role of music directors seem quite colossal such that they get exhausted or overstressed thereby giving attention to the aspect of their role that require minimal attention while other aspect that require their utmost attention tend not to get enough of their time. Also, the author sought to know if the academic qualifications of the music directors was also a factor in making them effective in their job role. This raises concern on what exactly constitutes the role of a music director. To determine the aim of this study, three choral music group were selected for the study in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of music directors and choristers from the case study choral music schools. A 4-point likert scale structured questionnaire was used as a means of data collection. Findings showed that, among the case study music directors, two of them had no music education qualifications while only one had a music education qualification. Also, the music directors had various roles depending on where they function. A typical Music director has liturgical, administrative and pedagogical roles. The author concluded that, for a music director to be effective in his role, having a basic educational certificate in music education.

Keywords: choral music, music director, teaching, learning

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, man has always searched for facts about music that are yet unknown, questions about music that have remained unanswered and effect or outcomes of music that have not been properly estimated (Mbanugo 2009:123). Different choral teachers have different approaches to choral teaching but all have one objective in mind – to bring out the best in the voices they work on. In teaching choral, the teacher should create an atmosphere of friendliness during classes with the students, this is essential as it affects the way the students receive instructions and directives. An atmosphere devoid of friendliness and kindness hampers choral teaching. Establishing an interest in your students will make them come out of their shells and be themselves and also learn well.

A choral teacher should be able to keep what is unique about an individual voice and still give the student the tools he/she needs to make it better. The teacher should deal with his/her students in the choir as individuals with different background, exposure and disposition. In line with this, Cranmer (1974) comments thus: “The teaching of singing is a most personal and individual job, and because the whole of singing is done by the singer himself each pupil becomes a separate problem” (p.59).

A choir needs the guidance of a teacher in its learning. Self learning may not go well with practice like choral. Graves (1954) cited in Ugoo-Okonkwo (2013) supports the idea of having a teacher to teach singing as he postulates:

Music, the arts and languages cannot be acquired without a teacher, and the role of the teacher is not only to import information and correct errors but also to record progress, to create enthusiasm and lead the way to the mountain tops (p.32).

Following the above postulate, it stands to reason that it is essential to have a choral teacher to teach the students. Singing cannot be learnt from books. Books only give ideas which a choral teacher may use in putting his students through. In choral teaching, the teacher and the taught have their parts to play to make it work. In the words of Henderson (1979:166), "It takes many elements in developing a vocal artist. Commitment almost always ranks first, the vocal instrument second, musicianship very near to the first two, and then come personal appearance (charisma), and inner drive".

The role of a music teacher in music teaching cannot be overemphasized. Teachers are important and make a difference. Their role goes well beyond information giving. They have the right and the responsibility to develop a climate in the classroom which supports effective learning. Understanding teaching has presented persistent and formidable challenges to those who have sought to improve the quality of teaching and learning over the years. The quality of teaching is a crucial factor in promoting effective learning in schools. In a bid to develop mature teachers who could demonstrate identifiable competences as musicians as well as educators, the Music Educators National Conference appointed a commission in 1968 on Teacher education to make recommendations for the improvement of the education of music teachers. In its report, the commission stated that;

"The development of music teacher competencies should form the total program of the music teacher training institutions. The demonstration of competence, rather than the passing of the course, should be the deciding factor in certification. This means that proficiency test, practical application of historical, theoretical and stylistic techniques and advance standing procedures should be employed, that screening procedures for admission to the program should be enforced and that an adequate means of final assessment should be developed and implemented (Abeles, Hoffer & Klotman, 1984).

This commission between 1968 and 1972, not only developed a set of recommendations designed to strengthened the training of individuals preparing to be music educators but also identified qualities and competencies necessary for such teachers.

Comprehensive Musicianship

According to Heavner (1995), Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance, (CMP) is a method of teaching students music that focuses on the relation of musical content towards performance. It is an interdisciplinary approach to music which focuses a concern for constituent parts and how they relate to the whole, such as how musical content area relates to the whole picture of music. The comprehensive musicianship approach brings balance and focus to the disparate areas of music, allowing students to pursue and explore all aspects of music and their interrelationships (Willoughby, 1990, p. 41). It is a means of promoting musical performance with an understanding to the students. The primary goal of CMP is to develop a total understanding and competency of all areas of music through the integration of performing, creating/composing, conducting, listening to and discussing music. Comprehensive musicianship through performance develops students to be well-rounded musicians. CMP is useful in harnessing otherwise fragmented knowledge of music that could prevent them from a comprehensive music understanding. This approach can be used by dividing the students into groups. Each group will be assigned with different aspects of music performance. Some will create music, while some others will source or create accompanying instruments. Others will sing, dance or conduct while some will play the musical instruments. This approach will provide the students with all-round music learning.

Competency-Based Music Teacher Education

Competency-Based Music Teacher Education is a training that requires a music teacher to learn and demonstrate a required body of knowledge, teaching skills and teacher attitudes. Also, called performance based music teacher education (PBMTE), competency based music teacher education is an effort to raise the level of quality among the nation's music school teachers. According to Bowles (2012), "Competency Based Teacher Education (CBTE) describes a teacher training program in which there are specific competencies to be acquired with corresponding explicit criteria for assessing

these competencies” (p.). Citing Arends, Masla and Weber (1971) in Bowles (1973), states that there are three criteria in CBTE, these are knowledge, performance and product which are used respectively to assess the teacher’s cognitive understandings, his teaching effectiveness. Competency based teacher education is a teacher preparation program which intend to develop among the teachers certain specified skills at mastery level. These skills are performed to specific standard under specific conditions. Competency based teacher education is a vehicle that can provided clearly discernible results. This is a clear response to the public’s demand for accountability in education. According to Raven and Stephenson (2001), competency-based teacher education encompasses a combination of knowledge, skills and behaviour utilized to improve performance. In the words of Ekwueme (2006);

Competency based teacher education is not new. It is indeed an ability to demonstrate competencies necessary to teach. Because of the unique nature of music, the performing and visual arts, there are specific skills that must be developed. The major step would be to identify the necessary competencies that can contribute towards developing a teacher who will perform as a professional in a musical, creative, knowledgeable and ethical manner. (p. 45).

Over the years, various choirmasters and choir leaders who did not have the opportunity to take courses in Music or Choir management have been in the business of singing, training and coaching young people to sing and perform well. While some school of thought believes that the role of a music director is to teach music, other school of thought believes that the role of the music director goes beyond only teaching of music but other activities such as administration and the choir management. In this study, the author sampled three choral groups to determine the specific roles these music directors play. Also, the author assessed if the type of academic qualification possessed by each music director contributed to the effectiveness of his role in the choral group.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a survey approach that involves a triangulated data collection process. It also involved a description of the emerging themes and patterns. As this research study was quantitative, the phenomenological approach to qualitative studies through the administration of in-depth interviews, rehearsal observations and document analysis data generating methodologies was done. Leeds and Ormrod (2005) posit that the purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand experiences from a participant’s point of view in his or her natural setting. In this study, the researcher went to schools, church and choral rehearsal centres to observe the participant in their natural settings. This is consistent with ethnographic studies as the researcher had to enter into schools, churches to investigate the various pedagogical approaches and the challenges associated with the teaching and learning of choral music.

Area of Study

This research work was carried out in Rivers State.



Fig. 1 Showing map of Rivers State

3.3 Population of the study

The population of this study included choral music schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The population comprised of School choirs, Church choirs and Choral groups who agreed to engage in the research data gathering process for nine weeks; the approximate time it takes to prepare a concert from beginning to end.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. Here three choral music groups were purposefully selected by the researcher based on their pedagogical approaches used in teaching and learning choral music. The three groups in Port Harcourt City were made up of a school, a church choir and a choral group namely:

- University of Port Harcourt Concert Choir,
- Christ Church Choir and
- Royal Male Choir of Port Harcourt City.

These chosen groups are in Port Harcourt City and are in close proximity to one another. They share similar characteristics in terms of age group of students, type of music they sing, administration strategies, and choral music teacher recruitment processes. So, from the three participating groups, three choral music teachers were selected through purposive sampling procedures. The teachers that were sampled were both specialists and generalists. Their selection was based on their experience and qualifications as music teachers in their respective groups.

Table 1: A Breakdown of the Total Number of Respondents for the Study

S/N	Selected University	No. of Choral Music Teachers & Instructors	Total No. of choristers	Total
1	Christ Church Choir	1	40	41
2	Royal Male Choir	1	40	41
3	University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) Concert Choir	1	40	41
	Grand Total	3	120	123

Instrument of Data Collection

A research questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Choir Training (QCT)” for music students was used while structured interview questions for oral interview for the music instructors were designed for the purpose of this study. Copies of the questionnaire were issued to the music students of the different choral groups used for this study. The structured interview questions were used for oral interviews for the music directors.

The structure of the questionnaire for the students had a section for the students to respond to the role of a music director/instructor in their choral group. The section was in the modified Likert fashion on a four (4) point scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Method of Data Analysis

The researcher used both an inductive approach and qualitative approach to analyse the data. The oral interview was analyzed inductively while the structured questionnaire given to music students (choristers) was analyzed qualitatively.

RESULTS

The choral music directors play significant roles in the teaching and learning of choral music in their various groups. All the choral music directors agreed to have served an administrative role first before serving as a music director. According to Mr. Enitoun Iyalla, the music director of Royal Male Choir, every music director must understand his choir and attain to the basic administrative needs of the choir. Prof. Onyee Nwankpa posited that, the music director must be good at what he does to inspire the choir. He must be seen as a role model to the choir in the act of singing. He should be humane and easily accessible by the choir. He should be flexible enough to accept the worst chorister as long as the chorister is enthusiastic about learning choral music. His styles should easily be copied by his choir. Mr. Julian Wilcox, the music director of Christ Church added that, a music director must carry the affairs of the choir as his first priority to ensure the proper functioning of the choir. He must be

willing to accept that weakness of the choir and have the courage to work on improving the weakness of the choir to make it become better. Finally, he ended that, you can have the best voices in the choir but without appropriate administration, your choir will not succeed nor even come to lime light.

On the roles of music director in the teaching and learning of choral music in Nigeria, Prof. Nwakpa has it that his role as a music director goes far beyond just teaching choral music. He is also serving as a role model and a source of inspiration to his students to pursue their music career, this is very vital. "Setting standards for them to aim at is important to me... he asserts". He is able to achieve this through his vocal modeling and teacher personality which are energetic; he helps build confidence by singing with the students; his teacher behaviours assist in meeting goals. More so, he places importance on student-centered discovery learning and uses familial mentorship influenced knowledge and action in the classroom. Thus he uses the comprehensive musicianship approach to the choral music programme to help him achieve a role as a music director. He said that if he can help her students discover the talent inherent in them and harness the talent to it full capacity, then his role as a music director has been achieved.

Mr. Julian Wilcox possesses qualities important for effective choral teaching; he is confident, organized, and musically competent. His skills as a pianist and as a singer are strong, which enable him to effectively model and convey musical ideas. He speaks about his role as a music director which involves imparting the right kind of music attitudes in his students. This will go a long way in making them succeed in their music careers. However, he said that he was using a flexible leadership style which encourages the students in his class to share their knowledge of choral music with one another. He continued that shared knowledge encourages team work and increases their chances of working together as a team. He added that, his role as a music director does not end at teaching them how to sing but helping them to appreciate the importance of team work because for them to succeed in real life, they must learn how to work with other human beings effectively and efficiently through shared knowledge and ideas.

More so, first, he sees the student as a person and then as a choral singer. He added that this is a major change in his teaching philosophy. He believes that building confidence first in the person will bring a platform for the music experience to grow successfully. Moreover, seeing the student as a person first, gives you an idea of his cultural background which makes you understand him/her. This approach will help you harness the strength in the diversity of your group and thus make your students appreciate same about themselves... he added. Adding to his role as a music director to his student as a choral singer, is to develop a more consistent tone quality, therefore spending much more time with vowel unification.

Table 2: Choristers' responses on the role of a music director/instructor

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean Score	Remark
1	Selects a musical objective or concept within a piece and devises an exercise to teach the objective and evaluates whether the objective is met	77	32	8	3	120	3.52	Accepted
2	Ensures that rehearsal plans are presented in a linear fashion and learning in a choral context is sequential	46	62	15	9	120	3.41	Accepted
3	Ensures proper vocal technique in teaching and learning choral music	39	73	7	1	120	3.25	Accepted
4	Contributes to the growth and improvement of the teaching and learning of choral music	29	76	10	5	120	3.07	Accepted

In table 2 above, the chorister responded to the roles that their music director play in their choral group. Four (4) items were postulated to measure the roles the music directors/instructors play. All the items tested above the mean criterion mark of 2.50. Thus, it was accepted. Item one determined if the music director/instructor selects a musical objective or concept within a piece and devises an exercise to teach the objective and evaluates whether the objective is met. It had a mean score value of 3.52

which was higher than the criterion mean score mark of 2.50. Item two measured if the music director/instructor ensures that rehearsal plans are presented in a linear fashion and learning in a choral context is sequential. This item had a mean score value of 3.41 which was higher than the criterion mean score mark of 2.50 and it was accepted. Item three ascertained if the music director/instructor ensures proper vocal technique in teaching and learning choral music and it had a mean score value of 3.25 which was higher than the criterion mean score mark of 2.50. Thus was accepted. Item four assessed if the music director/instructor contributes to the growth and improvement of the teaching and learning of choral music and it had a mean score value of 3.07 which was higher than the criterion mean score mark of 2.50. It was hence accepted.

FINDINGS

On the educational qualifications of the music directors of the music groups, the director of Christ Church, Port Harcourt however does not possess the music academic qualifications to teach choral music. However, he is one of the best among his equals in choral music in Port Harcourt. Mr. Julian Wilcox is a native of Peterside (Ayama) community in Bonny Local Government Area of Rivers State. He attended Model Primary School, Bonny, Bonny National Grammar School, Stella Maris College, Port Harcourt and Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt where he studied Agricultural Engineering. He also holds the prestigious D-NIIT diploma in Computing and its practice. The music director of the Royal Male Choir in an interview session with him agreed not to have had any educational background knowledge in choral music. However, he basically handles the administrative task of the group and employs the services of vocalists to help teach choral music to his choir. However, the director of the University of Port Harcourt school choir is a refined musicologist. He is a professor of music with his first and second degree in Music. His area of specialization is music theory and composition. He has led the school choir the various music competitions and he has won several awards and accolades as the school music director. Hence, in terms of educational qualification, the music director of the University of Port Harcourt school choir was the only music director with the required educational qualification to teach choral music.

On the roles, the music directors had various roles depending on where they function. A typical Music director has liturgical, administrative and pedagogical roles but for the purpose of this study, we shall consider and focus only on the pedagogical role of a music director. Music directors must be well-trained in the fundamentals of music, conducting, vocal and choral techniques. Ideally, the director should have a degree in music with a special emphasis in voice or choral conducting. A music director should strive to possess the following attributes: (1) Has a working knowledge of the fundamentals of music. (2) Can play a keyboard instrument. (3) Has a good ear for pitch and rhythm. (4) Understands how to create balance for a choral ensemble. (5) Has a working knowledge of basic vocal fundamentals and choral techniques, and able instruct singers in them. (6) Has a working knowledge of the rudiments of conducting, including: (a) Beat patterns (b) Attacks and releases; Cueing (c) Expression. (7) Has a working knowledge of the organ and the ability to help the organist effectively accompany and support the choir during rehearsals and/or performances. (8) Has a working knowledge of English diction as it applies to choral singing.

CONCLUSION

The role of a music director is demanding as such, individuals who occupy such position should have a good background in music education, administration as well as liturgical skills. Having one or more of these skill sets is still not a guarantee for becoming a successful music director but it will provide the individual with the necessary skills to be effective in carrying out the role function of a music director. Thus, the author concludes that, the above-mentioned skills are key requirements needed by prospective or music directors to be effective and efficient in their role responsibilities.

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Appendix I

Students Questionnaire on the Roles of the Choral Music Directors in the Teaching and Learning of Choral Music

Instruction: Please tick the column that best applies to you.

Note: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	Teacher selects a musical objective or concept within a piece and devises an exercise to teach the objective and evaluates whether the objective is met				
2	Teacher ensures that rehearsal plans are presented in a linear fashion and learning in a choral context is sequential				
3	Teacher ensures proper vocal techniques in teaching and learning choral music				
4	Teacher contributes to the growth and improvement of the teaching and learning of choral music				