

**MUSIC EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR THE HANDICAPPED CHILDREN**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Music is universally important to every human being. It relates to, and is part and parcel of children's education where creative experiences and manipulative skills are gained and developed. Every child responds to the rhythm and the activities of man are often connected with music. Through musical activities, children acquire the basic skills, attitudes, values, norms, customs, and knowledge and tend to appreciate of their culture. Like every other human being, the handicapped children too, possess aptitudes, skills, concepts and knowledge that if appropriately utilized will help to solve many of the physical, social, educational, political and economic problems in the society. The handicapped children can learn how to sing, dance, play musical instruments and perform other musical skills in order to demonstrate their capabilities and relevance in the society. This paper therefore, examines the basic educational needs and musical activities of the handicapped children and sees how best music education can effectively be used to enhance livelihood of this vulnerable group.*

**Key words:** Music, Handicap, Culture, Development, Growth and Instrument

**INTRODUCTION**

Music grows out of daily experiences and contributes to the physical, social and emotional growth of children. It has always been an inseparable factor in human existence and is experienced and enjoyed by every individual, handicapped and non-handicapped. Ekwueme(2002, pp. 9-80) stated that "music is a useful discipline in developing the totality of man, his body, mind and soul". Alor (1994, pp.64 - 76) further opined that "music education develops man's emotion, intellect, physique, moral principles, individual character, traits, and

habits, thus manifesting itself as a vital aspect of culture that is instrumental to personality growth and development”.

Children respond to music by physical movement to what is heard and in the process becoming oriented to rhythm, pitch, tone quality, color and so on. Ekwueme (1999) observed that “music education ensures a complete integration of cognitive, affective, socio-cultural, and psychomotor and aesthetics goals in the development of the child at different levels of education”.

Music cannot be divorced from the daily social, political, physical, educational and emotional activities of the handicapped and non-handicapped children. It enriches the intellect, and acquisition of skills and competences. Dicck’ Duvwarovwo (2016) stressed that “music is the way of expressing feelings and emotion. It enriches the mind, give self-confidence. It has powerful therapeutic effect on the human psyche (p, 305).

Music education aims at the vocational, emotional, physical, economic and social development of the handicapped. As a vocation, it equips the child with a career and intellectually help the child to conquer the obstacles of his/her environment; socially, it introduces the child to teamwork, musical competitions and performances; emotionally, music helps the child to express his feelings; and economically, it exercises and trains the body of the child through different musical activities such as instrumental playing, singing, composing songs, conducting ensembles, and many other vocational activities.

Music is a life-long source of pleasure and satisfaction to the handicapped and non-handicapped children. Mereni (2014) observed that “humans and animals are sensitive to sound in general, and to rhythm in particular, the rhythm being the first and most sensuous ingredient of music, the

enormous power and influence which music exercises on human emotions is accountable to the centrality of rhythm/music in the psychological development of man (pp. 9-10).

Adesokan (2003) opined that “every child possesses some degree of musical response, through which they can express their thoughts and feelings. Music has a significant role to play in the life of the handicapped children”. The need for music education helps the handicapped children to cultivate aesthetic responsiveness and provide outlet for emotional, creative and self expression. Agu (2015) pointed out that “music through its form, content and performance situations, produce musical and non-musical emotions and stimulates information. The application of any music expression, be it vocal, instrumental or body movements knowledge of the culture and that of language of the performer is indispensable (p.3). It enables the child to develop cultural interests and discover talents which are useful for living.

Music is the most effective vehicle for child growth and development. Music is one of the greatest educational and social values which help the handicapped children to grow socially, intellectually, physically and emotionally. Adedeji (2018) opined that “music serves as a medium of praise, thanksgiving, worship, invocative, inspirational, educative, communicative, therapeutic, instrument of discipline and social control (p.15). Music offers opportunities for children to develop faculties of imagination, manipulation, creativity, sensitivity, emotion and insights. Adegbite (1996) observed that “the aim of teaching music in school is to provide outlet for creativity, self-expression and transmit cultural heritage to succeeding generations”. Music is an essential ingredient in the day’s activities of the handicapped children. Activities such as singing, playing, acting, recording, conducting, composing, directing, to mention but a few, can involve music in one way or another.

## **Handicapped Children**

The handicapped is a person whose ability to function efficiently in the society is restricted by impairment. Okogbo (1985) posited that “a handicapped is an interference or obstruction to normal growth, development and/or educational progress”. The handicapped children have the ability to contribute to the growth and development of the society.

The handicapped have impairments related to sight, hearing, mental, physical, emotion, speech and other difficulties including learning.

The Dunn (1973) classified handicapped children into seven categories. They include: (a) mentally retarded children, (b) socially maladjusted children, (c) emotionally disturbed children, (d) speech and language handicapped children, (e) hearing impaired children, (f) visually impaired children, and (g) physically handicapped children. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) defines Special Education as “customized education programme designed to meet the unique needs of persons with special needs that the general education programme cannot cater for such as visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical and health impairment, intellectual disability, emotional and behavioral disorder, speech and language impairment, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, the gifted and the talented and the albinos” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013, p. 65). The problems of the handicap vary from place to place and their cases are determined by their environment and conditions beyond their control.

Traditional Yoruba society shows negative attitudes towards the handicapped through some of their unguarded utterances. They termed handicapped children as ‘abirun’, ‘didinrin’, ‘abami’, ‘alawokun’, and associate them in the society as object of ridicule, shame or pity. Most handicapped children exhibit retarded development and physical growth; and suffer rejection,

isolation, and maltreatment from other members of the society. In support of this observation, Farrant pointed out that:

A child who suffers from a handicap is doubly disadvantaged because he has not only to bear his handicap but also the prejudices that most societies express towards those who are different. This can be acutely painful for the child, and can lead to complicated feelings of loneliness, rejection and frustration (Farrant, 1980, p.97).

Even children, regardless of their difficulties or problems, have their own unique approaches to learning. Many handicapped children are handicapped only in particular situation and not in all the situations. They can be trained to live meaningful and productive lives.

Musical growth takes into account developmental sequences in handicapped persons such as powers of sound discrimination, musical taste and feelings, recognition of familiar melodies, learning to sing, learning to dance, learning to play certain musical instruments of choice, loving certain musical activities, learning to appreciate music, perception and conception, labeling of music, identification of musical instruments, and others. Musical growth is an essential part of social living and social relationships and offers a sense of belonging in the corporate musical activities.

### **Basic Needs of the Handicapped Children and their Musical Activities**

The handicapped children in our various societies have the same needs as everyone else. What is different is the way in which they are able to obtain need fulfillment. Many of the handicapped persons are unnecessarily dependent on their peer age groups and the society at large because they have not been assisted to utilize their potential capabilities to learn technical and vocational skills available within their environment. The society looks down on the handicapped because they do not engage them in useful economic and vocational activities other than begging for

alms. The blind can listen to music sound, play musical instruments like piano, organ, accordion, guitar, flute, drums, sing and dance. Ikibe (2017) stated that “music is the combination of various sounds made pleasant either melodically or harmonically to the ears which could come from the human or musical instruments (p. 337)

Through musical activities, they can work and earn their living through music like non-disabled performance, entertainers, singers, drummers, dancers, conductors, computers, technologists, and at the same time contribute their own quota to the growth and development in the society. According to Dicck - Duvwarovwo (2016) music education is the system that is able to equip the individual with appropriate skills. The blind receives information through such sensory avenues as hearing, touching, feelings, and vibrations of musical sounds like singing, dancing, playing any of the musical instruments, and consequently mould the character of the child to enable career success. The child will be gainfully employed in the society and also demonstrate good social and moral attributes (p.310)

Handicapped persons have been seen and recognized as great musicians. Notable examples include: Ludwig Van Beethoven - the famous deaf classical/romantic composer; George Frederick Handel and J.S Bach, the famous Baroque composers of Halleluyah Chorus; 48 Fugues whowere blind; the minstrel singer in Nigeria, Aderohunmu Alias Kokoro who was also blind; and other television performers, entertainers, singers and dancers.

The blind can be trained at the music institutions as music conductors, music technologists, composers, singers and dancers too. The major activity will be centered on the use of the sense of touch of musical instruments, feelings pitch and perception of musical sound. The essential fact is that the impaired people will have, at their disposal, a medium of expression. This leads to

a sense of thinking and feeling and consequently brings about needed social and emotional adjustments. Mba stressed that:

... to make up for impaired or total loss of vision, visuallyhandicapped children in general must be given the opportunity to absorb as much information as they can. Thus, they need formal touching in fields such as music, art, recreation and interpersonal relations, among others (Mba, 1991).

The chief vehicle with which they may work with the blind is the kinesthetic sense or sense of rhythms, appreciation and aural perception in music which develop a high sense of degree in the blind. The blind can be introduced to musical activities such as clapping or tapping of note values, aurally identifying the metre and tempo of short musical pieces, and aural perception of tonal melodies, diatonic scales, intervals, feeling for pulse, syllables, phrase, gradation of tones, accuracy of notes and time patterns.

Deaf persons must be educated for useful citizenship and benefit of musical activities as medium of expression and communication. Deaf people do perceive music (rhythm) tactilely and not through the sense of hearing.

When the language of music comes to their aid, the feelings of inferiority are reduced. Clair asserted that:

... the music studios serve many purposes for the deaf students. There are therapeutic values in developing motor coordination and manipulative skills to which he can adopt if guided. It is an agent for relief of frustration which are so prevalent in late adolescence (Clair, 1995, p.25 ).

Deaf persons can manipulate musical instruments, dance, and set up band instruments and equipment. The music teacher's role is to guide, stimulate and encourage music students impaired in one way or another. Music is a diagnostic tool and the handicapped persons need musical skills to operate such as playing of percussion instruments rhythmically, and drum

beating as expression for integration, co-operation and contact. Some handicapped students exhibitperseveration by repeating a phrase or a portion of a song, he or she knows, without being able to sing the whole song.

The foregoing diagnostic examples point to the fact that each handicapped reacts differently to a stimulus, or may express himself or herself differently, even if using the same musical idiom (musical instrument).

The musical activities for the mentally retarded will need to be in the area of things and materials, instruments, composition, music technology, and many others. The vibration of a musical sound acts as a safe means of protection and projection for such a handicap person.

Music therapy is as old as man. David, in the Holy Bible, played the harp to relieve Saul of this neurotic depression. The playing of wind instruments has a therapeutic value when the treatment requires the strengthening of the lips and mouth muscles. Evidently, singing, which involved deep breath and breathe control has a therapeutic value. Robert (1967) stated that “the world – renowned music conductor, Hebert Von Karajan, revealed the effect of music on heart beat and blood pressure while conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra...”

## **CONCLUSION**

The music teacher has a powerful educative tool which other subject teachers do not have. Music can be used to alleviate emotional and mental illness in the handicapped and non-handicapped persons. There are many handicapped children in our educational institutions of all categories and the educational programmes for these children should be vocationally oriented by way of earning a living.

Success in working with handicapped children is dependent on the teacher's attitude towards the child's handicap. Teacher's attitude can influence the attitude of other children in the class for good or bad. The way the physically and mentally fit students view the handicapped students is thus determined by the instructor. This further implies to how the general society will view this vulnerable group.

The handicapped children have some place in the society just like anyone. However, their place is very special in that it is much dependent on the rest of the society. For them to realize their potential and use it to make positive contributions, the society must help them. Again, more opportunities should be provided for the handicapped persons who can do things by themselves.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the discussion in this paper, it is therefore recommended that a functional integration policy be formulated and implemented, and adequate facilities be provided. Facilitation is in terms of resources, personnel and basic learning support materials that should be availed and employment opportunities for the handicapped children in our society that should also be created.

There should be basic vocational rehabilitation centers which train the handicapped to gain independence and social and emotional self-reliance. The society and the government as well ought to develop a positive attitude towards the handicapped children. They must be seen as human beings who can live normal life with proper training and opportunities. Consequently, they will develop sense of belongingness and may end up taking up their places in the society and making use of them potentially to enhance their livelihoods.

Government should provide musical opportunities for the handicapped children in Nigerian schools and colleges. Every child should be given the opportunity to study music as an academic subject. The handicapped children should have the opportunity to become personally involved in music-making by singing, playing, dancing, listening, creating and dramatizing.

Music teachers should demonstrate to the handicapped children that you believe in them and in their differences, maturation level and creative abilities. The handicapped children need love, acceptance, security and a feeling of success. Their desire to handle and manipulate musical instrument should be allowed unconditionally.

Aggressive and self-assertive students in our schools must be encouraged to sing in choirs, thus, realizing that his voice (ego) should be kept within the limitation of the group.

The educational system designed for the handicapped should be both academic and vocational. The education should be based on his or her environment and must be appropriate to the degree and nature of the disability so as to lead to a sense of achievement relative to their disability.

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