BASIC TECHNIQUES APPLIED IN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL CLARINET TEACHING: A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Instrumental music learning is supposed to commence from childhood; as early as three years, as obtainable in the Suzuki method of violin learning so that the learner can improve relatively faster. Research has shown that students prefer music that they can watch, dance to and participate in, whereas the music taught in the classroom are mostly theory based in content and therefore is faced mainly with poor response of students while being taught in the classroom. Through participant observation and consultation of relevant literature, this work investigated students' participation in music performance at St. Jude Private School, Lagos; and tries to provide basic instruction that contains the concepts and fundamental knowledge of clarinet, skills, values and right attitudes towards instrumental music performance needed to play the clarinet.

Introduction

Music deals with the combination of different sounds that are pleasing to the ear. It is expressed by Protnoy in Idolor (2002) as:

> *The combination of sound and rhythm by human beings to be sung or played on instruments with the task of pleasing the emotions and stimulating the intellect in accordance with the society's theoretical framework (p.54).*

In addition, Onwuekwe (2017) noted that music is 'the art of combining sounds or tones for reproduction by the voice or by the various kinds of musical instruments in rhythmical, melodic and harmonic forms to affect the emotions'(p.2). In general, music can be

said to be a language that is universal which appeals to all when played rhythmically, melodically and harmonically in a way that it affects emotions.

On the other hand, music teaching and learning are faced with miriads of problem; however, there are different measures that can be taken to enhance the learning of music in schools. Learning is a fundamental process of life engaging, affecting all forms of behavior skills, knowledge, attitudes and personality. The term learning is very comprehensive and it covers a wide range of activities which cannot be explained within a limited frame work; hence the need to take a brief look at what it entails.

The Concept of Learning

Learning as a concept is a worldwide phenomenon; practiced all over the world; taking place at all times and in all things. Learning according to Burns (1995) is "a relatively permanent change in behavior which includes both observable activity and internal processes" (p.12). In same view Ekeruo, et al in Sam (2006) support that "learning is a relatively permanent change in behavior," but added that it is "as evidenced by a change in performance through practice" (p.21).

Music Pedagogy

Music pedagogy according to Ogbeide (2018:467) is defined as "the act or process of imparting musical knowledge and skills on students." Her definition highlights two key facts- imparting musical knowledge and skills on students. In another earlier definition, Ekwueme (2010) noted that music pedagogy is closely associated with the teacher, teaching methods, and learning environment, as well as the overall climate in which the process of education takes place. Hence, from her view of music pedagogy closely associated with the teacher, teaching methods, teaching-learning materials, it therefore requires adopting the teaching method that will motivate and enhance what Ojukwu (2011:58) termed the teacher-centered teaching known as expository method and the learner-centered teaching called the

discovery method. Observing this method of teaching will enhance and motivate the learner's ability of engaging themselves in musical experiences and performances. In line with this, Onyiuke (2003) noted that:

> *Within the music class the teacher should make adequate effort to establish a favorable musical knowledge, understanding and responsiveness. The teacher should provide both stimulating and challenging environment where the child [the learner] can explore to achieve his/her objectives (p.69).*

Music pedagogy is the process of attending to the learner's needs, experiences, feelings and making specific interventions to help the learner improve maximally and be effective in learning particular things. Thus, the efficacy of music pedagogy is that it is the process of music teaching, learning and training the learners/students in acquiring musical knowledge, skills, principles and values in order to be sensitive to music and be useful members of the society.

Performance Pedagogy

Ekwueme (2012) defines performance as an act of doing or performing a task. His definition highlights one key fact- preforming a task. The task might represent singing or playing musical instrument in a concert or having musicians performing before an audience. Pratt (1995) in Onyiuke (2006:40) had earlier posited that performance, whether by singing or playing an instrument, is one of the two principle means of developing and sharing musical skills, creativity and understanding.

Hence, performing by playing musical instrument is an effective way of developing student's musical skills and creativeness that enhance the development of musical understanding. Campbell & Scott-Kassner (2010) assert that:

> *Making music is equivalent to playing musical instruments. Because musical instrument are extensions of the musical self, when children play*

> *they are often demonstrating what they know and can express musically. To play a musical instrument is to deliver to others ideas that are not easily expressed verbally (p.218).*

In the same vein, the playing of a musical instrument can precede and later coincide with the reading and writing of notation. Nketia in Ezeugwu (2016) agrees to this view as he states that performance opportunities provide the learner with "exposure to musical situations and participation more than formal teaching" (p.6). Musical performances often attract wide and open participation and at such, when student participate practically with their musical instrument, it enhances effective learning. Why count rhythms when they can be felt and played on a musical instrument? Why learn staff notation when the symbols can be realized musically? A Chinese proverb says "Tell me, I will forget, show me I might remember, involve me and I will learn". Onwuekwe (2007) rightly observed that:

> *Learning takes place best when children are involved in the teaching-learning process. For the young learner, music should be the discovery of musical sound- what it is like, what produce it, how he might respond to it, how it is organized and how he might manipulate it (p. 29).*

Students begin to learn when they are deeply involved in the learning situation. For instance, in learning the clarinet, to get the students involved, substantial attention should be given to method of teaching and learning of how to play Clarinet. It is essential to always have a starting point. For beginner's, learning should progressively be arranged from simple to more complex learning. To achieve this, the learners/ students must practice severally and master one task effectively before delving into another one.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Edward Thorndike's Connectionism theory (Trial and Error theory). Discussing this theory, Alao &Ademiyi in Agu & Okpara (2017:29) observed the following:

1. **Law of Readiness:** Once a person is motivated to embark on a task, doing it brings satisfaction to the actor or learner.
2. **Law of Exercise:** Thorndike's promotes repetition because it leads to learned association. Constant practice is needful if an action must be mastered and not forgotten. Lack of practice leads to forgetfulness.
3. **Law of Effect:** Thorndike is of the view that any action that produces satisfying effect will certainly be repeated.

The music teachers must learn how to motivate students to learn and participate effectively in the learning process. This can also be achieved through Operant Conditioning learning theory propounded by B. F. Skinner in modifying the students behavior through the use of reward, positive and negative reinforcement like commending any positive effort or improvement of the student's with positive remarks such as 'very good', 'good effort', 'good attempt', 'great', 'well done', etc. While negative reinforcement should be administered with caution and as a last resort to avoid discouraging the students' effort of learning how to play musical instruments.

The Clarinet

The first iteration of the modern day clarinet was invented around the year 1700. The word 'clarinet' by itself always refers to the Bb clarinet. However, there are several different types of clarinets and the most common are; Bb clarinet, Eb clarinet, A clarinet, the bass clarinet, the contrabass clarinet, the contra-alto clarinet and the alto clarinet. Clarinets are used in all types of music and each clarinet has its own unique sound and, therefore, its own applications. However, for the purpose of this study and for a beginner, it is advised that you

start with the very common Bb clarinet which is the best one to learn first and it will be the one you use the most by far. After that you can determine which other clarinet that will suit your individual needs

Clarinet Accessories and Setting up Routine

According to Bennett (2006:6), it is important to know that your complete outfit should include: upper joint, lower joint, bell, mouthpiece, reed, mouthpiece cap, barrel, ligature, cork grease and pull-through cleaning cloth (See appendix). Before you play you must learn how to set up your instrument to avoid damaging it.

1. It is important to make sure that the reed is good and swirl saliva around the reed to moisten it before you play.
2. Connect the upper and lower joints using a twisting action and check the alignment of the joints.
3. Twist on the bell, the barrel, and the mouthpiece.
4. Attach the reed to the mouthpiece using the ligature and it should be tight enough to hold the reed firmly. The end of the reed needs to be exactly level to the tip of the mouthpiece.
5. Gently push the mouthpiece onto the barrel with a light twisting action and make sure the cork is greased.

It is important to spread a little grease on the cork from time to time and always use the pull-through cleaning cloth to dry your clarinet after playing, also wipe off excess moisture from the reed before replacing it on the mouthpiece. Before playing the clarinet, there are basic techniques required for effective teaching and learning.

Basic Steps Applied in Learning the Clarinet

Clarinet playing is an observable behavior which takes its root from internal activities such as the rudiments of music before the actual playing of the musical instrument. The basic steps the researcher applies have to do with theoretical and practical methods, which includes; knowledge of rudiments of music, posture and holding the clarinet, breathing, embouchure and tonguing.

Knowledge of Rudiments of Music

Here, the learner is exposed to good knowledge of basic rudiments of music. This is exoected to cover topics like lines and spaces, clef, note names, note values, their rests, ime signatures, bar lines, accidentals and so on.

Posture and Holding the Clarinet

Posture refers to the position of one's body when playing the clarinet either by standing or sitting. When standing, you stand in a relaxed, comfortable and upright way with the feet slightly apart. When sitting to play, sit upright and at the edge of the chair with your feet slightly apart. When playing the clarinet, the way and manner in which you hold it matter a lot. On holding the clarinet, Bennett (2006) asserts that:

> *The joint of your right thumb should be placed underneath the thumb rest half way down the clarinet and cover the thumb hole with your left thumb... the fingers of each hand should curl around the body of the clarinet to the front, making sure they do not push against any keys at the sides. When playing the clarinet, it is necessary to always held it at an angle such that your right thumb should be about fifteen centimeters or six inches away from your body Bennett (pg.8)*

Breathing

Breathing in the normal sense is made possible through the lungs. He, who breathes well, plays well. When breathing in and out, always use your diaphragm which is the muscle between the lungs and the stomach that causes your stomach to go out when breathing in and to go in when breathing out. To be able to control your breathing when playing depends on your effectively using your diaphragm than breathing with the muscles high up in your chest. Bennett (2006:8) records that "a relaxed, controlled posture is essential for and correct breathing". He, who breathes well, plays well.

Embouchure

According to Bennett (2006), good embrochure would include turning the bottom lip in slightly so that it rests on one's bottom teeth; placing the mouthpiece in the mouth so that the reed lies on the center of your bottom lip with about a centimeter. Then rest your top teeth on the top of the mouthpiece, and, while smiling slightly and keeping a pointed chin, close the sides of your mouth around the mouthpiece. It is necessary to note that the lips should form a firm, air tight seal around the mouthpiece and make sure that you don't puff your cheeks out when playing.

Tonguing

Tonguing is used to stop or release the air into the clarinet in order to produce sound. When tonguing, the tongue should touch the underside of the reed, near the tip. The following techniques are very necessary as observed by Bennett (2006), in order to ensure a clean attack:

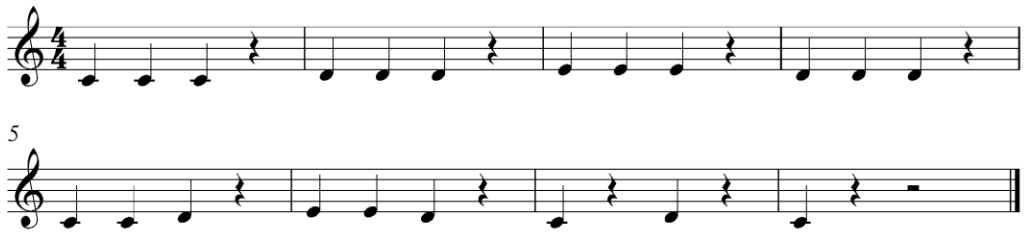
i. Breathe in and form the correct embouchure.
ii. Place your tongue along the underside of the reed so there is about a half a centimeter of contact, from the tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed.
iii. Start a note by releasing the tongue from the reed as in the word *Dee*
iv. While tonguing, make sure that the note should have a definite and tidy beginning.

Application of the Basic Steps

The following techniques for teaching the clarinet was actively applied on JSS 3 students of St. Jude Private School located at 5th Avenue Festac Town Lagos and the researcher. Mr. Odewumi E. O. is the music teacher. The researcher carefully observed the teacher who gave his full accurate support and rapport during the study. The materials used are A NEW TUNE A DAY FOR CLARINET by NED BENNETT and LEARN AS YOU PLAY CLARINET by PETER WASTALL which are very essential for a beginner and achieving goals in performance. The excercises are as follows:

Exercise 1: Practicing of long notes daily; observing the rests and not forgeting to tongue each note.

Exercise 2: Trying the exercise below and observing the rests; breathing in quickly during quarter-note rest.



Exercise 3: Playing pieces containing E, D and C.

Exercise 4: Teaching new notes F and G; observing dotted notes as explained before and tied notes which are the same pitch joined together to make a longer note.

Exercise 5: Playing piece containing F.

Exercise 6: Playing piece containing G.

Exercise 7: Teaching new notes A and F# and introducing dynamics. Taking note of the following:

i. 'A' is played by rotating your index finger upwards so the side of the finger opens the key. This will ensure smoothness when approaching 'A' from lower notes.

ii. Rolling the index finger: Without expression, music can be lifeless and mechanical. Ways by which color is introduced in music is to play a piece by different levels of loudness. ***F*** stands for the word *forte* and means loud. ***P*** stands for the word *piano* and means quiet.

Exercise 8: Playing of note according to the dynamics displayed underneath them.

Exercise 9: Playing notes while observing the accidentals

Exercise 10: Playing piece containing A and F#.

Exercise 11: Teaching new notes B, A and G.

Exercise 12: Playing of Appegios etc.

Summary

Generally, for effective teaching and learning during the training period, it is very important to evaluate each of the students individually or perhaps in groups to consider or ascertain their level of understanding and improvement in the performance practice. This view is supported by Leonhard and House in Mbanugo (2006), who observed that "evaluation is essential to high level of motivation in learning and the improvement of teaching methods…., Evaluation should be comprehensive and continuous" (p.48).

However, the impact of the teaching on the student learning needs to be ascertained. Upholding the above view, Onuora-Oguno (2007:79) asserted that "evaluation is a process that involves an interaction between two or more individuals."

For effective evaluation, the following summary on guidelines for the teachers and students on the teaching and learning should be followed:

To the Teachers:

1. The students should be acquainted with the rudiments of music that is relevant for clarinet playing. Rudiments of music are the foundation of clarinet playing.
2. Before the commencement of a new lesson, the students should play their take home-work given to them to evaluate their level of understanding of the previous practice.
3. New notes should be introduced step by step with fingering exercises and playing pieces containing the new notes.
4. Observing the above number three guideline, sight-reading exercise should be simple at this stage. Try to motivate the students into reading the scores and playing them without writing the names of the lines and spaces on the scores.
5. The students should be motivated into playing shorter instrumental solos to help them develop a melodic memory. This will enhance their ability to remember melodic phrases.

6. The students should be exposed to scales and arpeggios and try as much as possible to play it from memory steadily and slowly. They should play within the range of the musical notes that they have been taught. Starting from one octave and proceed to two octave.
7. The posture and diaphragm should be adhered strictly to. The student should stand with a relaxed posture and make serious effort to play with an open throat for it will improve their tone.
8. It is very necessary that the students own a tutorial book that you as a teacher is using to guide them which will enhance easy practice.

All musical instruments require a degree of training before mastery.

To the Students/Learners

1. The students must own a clarinet for a good performance practice, and must be ready to work with the music teacher.
2. The students must be conversant with rudiments of music relevant to clarinet playing.
3. It is very necessary to do every home-work given diligently and be ready to sacrifice time and energy to practice.
4. Take your time and aim for a clear confident style. Play a piece slowly and accurately than to bluff your way through it quickly or being impatience to play.
5. Try to start every practice sessions with long notes to improve your tone and build up your strength.
6. Practice your exercise every day to improve your dexterity (the skill in using your hands). Don't play a piece nearly right, it should be completely right before you move on to the next.
7. Practice your scales and arpeggios steadily and slowly to enhance your fingers flexibility.
8. The students must own a good clarinet tutorial book such as; A New Tune a Day for Clarinet by Ned Bennett, Learn as You Play Clarinet by peter Wastall or any tutorial books your music teacher prefers that will enhance your practice.

9. Practice makes perfect. Make sure you practice not less than thirty minutes a day. Use the right diaphragm for complete breath control. Most importantly, relax whenever you are playing.

Recommendations

Music can only be learnt by active participation and lack of musical instruments poses serious problems to the students and the teachers. However, it is necessary that parents invest in their children's skills by providing them with musical instruments that will aid their active participation in performance pedagogy.

The school management should institute an open policy for students to spend time before-or after- school practicing; perhaps, few minutes during long-break period for students that are interested in practicing their musical instrument of becoming a proficient player.

The Association of Nigerian Musicologists (ANIM) in conjunction with the Management and Staff of Music Departments should set up a systematic plan that will enable the music undergraduate students go for I.T training in secondary schools. This will go a long way in exposing them to the students' practical musicianship performance , which in turn will increase the pupils' desire of studying the course as a career in future.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at ways by which performance practice should be enhanced through learning basic techniques of playing clarinet among Junior Secondary School Students which is also an introduction into learning how to play the clarinet for a starter using the researcher's experience at St. Jude Private School Lagos. The study raised the proper methodology required for effective participation in students' performance towards their musical instruments. The outcome of the study shows high level of interest, rapport and active

participation that reviews the student's keen interest and ability to participate more often in performance pedagogy.

In the same vein, it is very necessary that the students get what they deserve in terms of learning how to play their musical instruments and also participate in school musical activities. Therefore, the teacher needs to encourage, motivate and rapport with the students to enhance their creativities and assure their personal life success.

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