

**ASSESSMENT OF MUSIC TEACHERS ON THE POOR PERFORMANCE OF  
WEST AFRICAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL (WASSCE) MUSIC PRACTICAL  
TEST**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Music practical performance as examined by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is one of the areas that provide a rich domain for study of both cognitive and motor skills of the students and provide employable skills for them. Unfortunately, for the past two years, chief examiners' reports indicate poor performance among the candidates. This study is an assessment of the views of Music teachers on this menace and how it could be checked. Through descriptive survey, 40 music teachers were randomly selected from 40 Senior High Schools offering Music as elective subject for the West African Senior High School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) across Ghana. All the 40 teachers participated in the study. Hypotheses drawn indicated that there was no significance difference in the views of the Music teachers on all the research questions; however, Chi-square analysis revealed a constant variable with the need for practical music performance at the Senior High School. The paper then recommends that pragmatic measures are taken by not only the WAEC, but the headmasters and the government at large.*

**Keywords:** WAEC, Ghana, performance test, music 3B (Aural), SHS,

**INTRODUCTION**

The role of practical work in music within the educational system is confirmed by numerous studies in many countries of the world. Like Zelenkovska (2014, p.437) puts it “the practical work in Music Education contributes to the overall development of a young person, which is reflected through inducing self-discipline, work habits, sense of responsibility, multi skills and successful integration in the society”. This assertion is acceptable because the practical

course in music at the Senior High School in Ghana for instance aims to ensure that students obtain the knowledge, the requisite skills, techniques and applications related to their various instruments, given that it will prepare them for employment and require them to pursue further studies at the tertiary level.

It is a gain saying that music is practically oriented and whoever learns music without practical skills becomes ‘half-baked’. One needs to perform on an instrument to show evidence of his studies in music because the music syllabus stresses on the development of practical skills and attitudes. Practical works which incorporate sight reading is regarded to be effective, simply because students are able to transfer their theoretical knowledge to actuality. This in effect helps them to internalize concepts of rudiments and theory.

This implies that the level of acquisition of music practical skills to be creatively exhibited by candidates in practical performance test needs to improve tremendously. As a result of this, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) makes use of practical test/examination to assess students’ musicianship performance skills. The practical performance test, Music 3, is one of the four components of the WASSCE Music programme offered over a period of three years. The other two components are Music 2 (Objectives and essays) and Music 4 (Aural). Areas of assessment of the practical performance test include two technical exercises (one in a minor key and the other in a major key), two musical pieces for each instrument (one African and one Western), and then two sight-reading pieces. These areas of assessment display students’ knowledge in rudiments and interpretation of musical scores.

Due to the wide range of instruments prescribed for the examination, students are given the chance to learn to play a chosen instrument even if they have had no experience with those instruments. This provides firm grounds for those who want to continue to study music at the tertiary level. However, the required skill development among the students is unsuccessfully

realized. The quality of the performance is dwindling according to reports from the chief examiners over the period (WAEC, 2013). The writers then investigate the factors in connection with the poor performance in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) Music practical performance test by administering questionnaire to Music teachers across Ghana to comment and provide their views about the problem and suggest ways for future projection.

### **Purpose of the Study**

A strong tradition of doing practical work in school Music has been established in Ghana. This is because practical work is emphasized by the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) and WASSCE Music syllabuses and is externally examined by the West African Examinations Council. The key aims of the syllabuses are essentially the attainment of Musical knowledge, and the development of practical skills and attitudes. Practical work is considered to be effective as it allows students to change the abstract to the concrete, thus helping in the internalisation and understanding of concepts (Arce & Betancourt, 1997). However, there are consistent reports indicating that the practical performance skills are unsuccessfully taught. It is in this context that the study finds out why students are not able to perform well in music practical performance test among Senior High schools in Ghana as organized by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Four variables of teachers investigated were years of experience in teaching music instrumental skills, level of practical ability, professional qualification and then experience as Music examiner of West African Examinations Council.

**The study sought to answer the following questions:**

1. Do teachers have the requisite practical skills to teach music?
2. Do heads of institutions offering music compromise with music teachers in terms of provision of facilities and the needed teaching materials?
3. Is the conduct of practical work a necessary component of Music at the SHS level?
4. Can a student obtain a credit in West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) in Music without passing the practical performance test?
5. Can the level of musicality of the students admitted for the music programme affect practical performance?

**Hypotheses**

**H1:** There is no significance difference in the views of music teachers on question 1 according to the four variables: Four variables investigated were years of teaching music practical skills, experience as examiners of West African Examinations Council and qualification as professional music teacher.

**H2:** There is no significance difference in the views of music teachers on question 2 according to the four variables

**H3:** There is no significance difference in the views of music teachers on question 3 according to the four variables

**H4:** There is no significance difference in the views of music teachers on question 4 according to the four variables

**H5:** There is no significance difference in the views of music teachers on question 5 according to the four variables

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed the descriptive research design. Questionnaire were employed and administered to music teachers to collect information and find out their views on the Music practical performance test of West African Examinations Council. The rationale was to find out the problems associated with the performance and how they can be solved. Four variables of teachers investigated were years of experience in teaching music instrumental skills, level of practical ability, professional qualification and experience as Music examiner of West African Examinations Council. A reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Formula. Results indicates that Music teachers, WAEC subject officers, policy makers and heads of the institutions offering music have roles to play to drastically reduce the poor performance status of Music Practical performance test among the candidates. Music teachers in the schools offering music in the regions formed the target population. A sample size of 40 music teachers were selected from 40 SHS schools offering music across the country. Depending on the number of schools offering Music in the regions, 6 from Volta region, 10 from Ashanti region, 4 from central region, 2 from Eastern region, 6 from Greater Accra region, 4 from BrongAhafo region and 2 from Western region. The teachers selected had presented candidates for the practical performance test. This specimen is a representative, considering the fact that they represent about 68% of schools who have presented candidates for practical performance test in a decade.

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire which consisted of two parts; Part 1 consisted of questions seeking information from teachers: years of teaching the music practical skills, practical abilities, WAEC examiner, teacher qualification while Part 2

contained Yes or No responses constituting the five research questions on factors responsible for poor music practical performance. Additionally, spaces were provided for teachers to give reasons for some responses where necessary. The questionnaire was designed after small-scale investigations of music practical performance test in two SHS in Winneba. Discussion with the music teachers as well as those acquainted with practical work at the SHS level also informed the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula. This value proved the reliability of the instrument as the coefficient obtained was greater than 0.5 ( $> 0.5$ ).

Descriptive statistics was used in the analysis of the responses and percentages calculated. Frequency counts were made and data collected were subjected to Chi-square statistical analysis to test the hypotheses. A constant value was obtained with the Chi-square as it was observed in the responses of Music teachers who think that Music practical performance test should be maintained as an unavoidable component of the Music course at the Senior High school level.

## **RESULTS**

The distribution of respondents as shown in Table 1 proves that most (77.5%) music teachers had over 5 years of experience; almost all (92.5%) of them have practical abilities; most (75%) of them do not have marking experience as examiners of WAEC and those qualified as music teachers constituted (82.5%).

Table 1. Teacher characteristics

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Group distribution</b>	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Years of teaching music practical skills	1-5 years	9	22.5
	6 years and above	31	77.5
Practical abilities	Yes	37	92.5
	No	3	7.5
Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	Examiners	10	25
	Non-examiners	30	75
Qualification	Qualified	33	82.5
	Unqualified	7	17.5

Table 2. Analysis of music teachers' responses to questions 1-5

Variable	Q1		Q2		Q3 (%)		Q4		Q5	
	(%)		(%)				(%)		(%)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
groups										
Years of teaching the music practical works										
Above 5 years	20(65)	11(35)	15(48)	16(52)	31(100)	0(0)	5(16)	26(84)	28(90)	3(10)
5 years or below	5(56)	4(44)	2(22)	7(78)	9(100)	0(0)	2(22)	7(78)	9(100)	0(0)
Practical abilities										
With	27(73)	10(27)	7(19)	30(81)	37(100)	0(0)	3(8)	34(92)	34(92)	3(8)
Without	1(33)	2(67)	0(0)	3(100)	3(100)	0(0)	1(33)	2(67)	3(100)	0(0)
Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)										
Examiners	7(70)	3(30)	3(30)	7(70)	10(100)	0(0)	0(0)	10(100)	9(90)	1(10)
Non-Examiners	22(73)	8(27)	10(33)	20(67)	30(100)	0(0)	3(10)	27(90)	24(80)	6(20)
Qualification										
Qualified	30(91)	3(9)	8(24)	25(76)	33(100)	0(0)	12(36)	21(64)	29(88)	4(12)
Unqualified	5(71)	2(29)	1(14)	6(86)	7(100)	0(0)	2(29)	5(71)	6(86)	1(14)



**Question 1:** Do teachers have the requisite practical skills to teach music?

Responses of music teachers to this question indicated that 65% of those who have taught music practical skills for more than five years and 56% responded Yes. Of the respondents, 73% and 33% of those with and without practical skills respectively responded Yes while most (67%) of the teachers who don't have practical skills are rather of the view that music teachers don't have the necessary practical skills to teach. On the other hand, 70% of examiners among them and 73% of non-examiners among them indicated Yes, while 91% of the qualified music teachers and 71% of the unqualified music teachers responded Yes.

**Question 2:** Do heads of institutions offering music compromise with music teachers in terms of provision of facilities and the needed teaching materials?

Teachers' responses to this question showed that 52% of those who have taught music practical skills above five years and 78% of those below five years indicated that heads of the institutions do not compromise. Similarly, 81% and 100% of those with and without practical abilities respectively responded No to the question. Most (70%) of the examiners of WAEC and 67% of the non-examiners of WAEC also indicated No. More so, 76% of qualified music teachers 86% of the unqualified music teachers all agreed that there is usually no compromise from the head masters.

**Question 3:** Is the conduct of practical work a necessary component of Music at the SHS level?

All the music teachers (100%), irrespective of their years of experience, practical abilities, examiner status and qualification, agreed on the necessity of the practical component of music to be done.

**Question 4:** Can a student obtain a credit in West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) in Music without passing the practical performance test?

Teachers responded to this question as follows: 84% for above 5 years and 78% for below 6 years, 92% for those with practical abilities and 67% for those without, 100% for examiners and 90% for non-examiners, 64% for qualified music teachers and 71% for unqualified music teachers indicated No to the question. All of them agreed that it is difficult for a music student to get a credit pass in WASSCE, if he/she fails the music practical performance test.

**Question 5:** Can the level of musicality of the students admitted for the music programme affect practical performance?

Majority (90%) of those who have taught the subject above 5 years and 100% of those below 6 years, 92% for those with practical abilities and 100% of those without, 90% for examiners and 80% for non-examiners, 88% for qualified music teachers and 86% for unqualified music teachers indicated that the level of musicality of the students admitted to do music at the Senior High School level greatly has impact on their practical performance.

Table 3. Chi-square analysis

Research question	Variable	X <sup>2</sup> value	Remark
Do teachers have the requisite practical skills to teach music?	Years of teaching the music practical works	0.01	-
	Practical abilities	1.01	NS
	Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	0.02	NS
	Qualification	0.01	-
Do heads of institutions offering music compromise with music teachers in terms of provision of facilities and the needed teaching materials?	Years of teaching the music practical works	0.01	-
	Practical abilities	1.00	NS
	Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	0.03	NS
	Qualification	-	NS
Is the conduct of practical work a necessary component of Music at the SHS level?	Years of teaching the music practical works	-	C
	Practical abilities	-	C
	Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	-	C
	Qualification	-	C
Can a student obtain a credit in West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) in Music without passing the practical performance test?	Years of teaching the music practical works	0.01	-
	Practical abilities	-	NS
	Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	0.02	NS
	Qualification	0.72	NS
Can the level of musicality of the students admitted for the music programme affect practical performance?	Years of teaching the music practical works	2.51	NS
	Practical abilities	-	NS
	Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)	0.10	NS
	Qualification	2.47	NS

NS = Not significant,  $\chi^2$ (Chi-Square); C = Constant (Chi-square could not be performed).

Chi-Square analysis could not be performed for teachers on the necessity of the conduct of the practical performance test (question 3) due to the constant value obtained as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' responses on whether the conduct of practical work is a necessary component of Music at the SHS level

Variable groups	Q3 (%)	
	Yes	No
<i>Years of teaching the music practical works</i>		
Above 5 years	31(100)	0(0)
5 years or below	9(100)	0(0)
<i>Practical abilities</i>		
With	37(100)	0(0)
Without	3(100)	0(0)
<i>Examiners of West African Examinations Council (WAEC)</i>		
Examiners	10(100)	0(0)
Non-Examiners	30(100)	0(0)
<i>Qualification</i>		
Qualified	33(100)	0(0)
Unqualified	7(100)	0(0)

Table 5. Chi-Square frequency for whether the conduct of practical work a necessary component of Music at the SHS level

<b>Is the conduct of practical work necessary at SHS level</b>			
	Observed	Expected	Residual
	N	N	
yes	40	40.0	.0
Total	40 <sup>a</sup>		

## DISCUSSION

The spectrum of views expressed by the music teachers on the poor practical performance of WASSCE music exams and the future projections are discussed around the research questions and the variables.

The poor practical performance is always seen in the poor sight reading skills, inability to perform the technical exercises given and then poor rendition of the two pieces chosen by the schools. It is clear from the results that 65% of the total number of the experienced (6 years and above) teachers testify that most music teachers have practical skills. It was explained that teachers normally encourage their students to choose instrument areas they are most familiar with. If that is the case, it will be surprising why students are not able to perform. Quite a significant difference was found, a percentage of 44% of the teachers below 6 years of experience agree that some of the music teachers in the Senior High schools cannot perform on any instrument, this is a sad issue. One would have thought that a music teacher needs to be a performer himself to be able to teach others but the case is different.

The examiners indicated that they don't seem to see practical skills in the teachers because in some of the schools they conducted exams, the students told them about the inability of their teachers in the performance skills. Some of the students also attribute it to poor attitude of the teachers and the students as a whole. Students normally don't perform well when there is poor attitude. Like Onder (2014) states, "Having a positive attitude towards a profession or a course may lead to achievement in that field of interest. Meaning, when both teachers and students have negative attitude towards a course or a programme, their scores in those subjects may be low and vice versa, this could be objected to but it seems possible since it has come from the students themselves. A total 67% of the teachers without practical abilities considered themselves so as they always fell on resource persons to help the students in the acquisition of practical performance skills. In the absence of the resource person, students are not able to do anything till practical performance test approaches. This is indeed uncharacteristic of a professional music teacher since the musician must be a master of the techniques of his art (Abiogu, Mbaji&Adeogun, 2015, p. 119).

It became very clear from the results that most headmasters do not compromise with the music teachers. Most music teachers have problems with their heads because they have requested for either music classrooms or instruments. The perception held about music by some headmasters is not a motivating factor for the provision of some of these facilities at all. In a study carried out by Erhan & Tamer (2009) in physical Education, it was stated that “suitable facility and equipment usage for the purpose of the course would be effective in the increase of both students’ and teachers’ motivation for physical education course”. These facilities are also important for the music teacher. Music teachers are only found important especially when schools are marking specific occasions. After the occasion, that is all because the study indicated how some of the headmasters normally ‘reject’ them in the distribution of school facilities to the various subject areas in the school. The headmasters consider those subjects as most important compared to music. It is not surprising when a research carried out by Faseun (2001, p. 90) confirmed that “the general populace has negative attitude to music as a subject in schools today”. Music classes are held in non-conducive environment thereby making the subject itself unattractive to other students. Students offering music become orphans in their own homes and that affects performance tremendously. This defect needs to be rectified for music to compete favourably well with other school subjects. This finding corroborates Ohene-Okantah’s (2003, p.35) assertion that the place of music and the arts in formal education in Ghana has always been tenuous. This is an unfortunate situation.

Teachers also perceived that the conduct of the practical performance test is essential for the understanding of musical concepts as well as providing employable skills to the youth. The youth can be empowered through strong music programmes in Ghanaian schools to provide them musical opportunities and exposure. Corroborating on this, Ifenkwe (2012) echoes that “learning music and how to use musical instruments adulates a unique way of exposing the

youths to beauty and interest that nurture excellence and creativity”. Indeed, it is upon this fact that a music teacher needs to be practically good to nurture the students accordingly.

In this regard, a total of 100% was achieved according to the variables without any exception. Teachers gave a lot of reasons such that every music teacher should be able to sing or play an instrument and then interpret written scripts. This is what the practical performance seeks to achieve. The examiners were of the view that the perceptual consequences of music practical performance include successful communication of interpretations, good sight reading skills and concordance with the examiners' expectations. If examiners' expectations are reached according to their criteria for assessment, then the practical performance is good and vice versa. It was however explained that set pieces from WAEC don't reach the schools in time. Sometimes, pieces are obtained two weeks to the performance test and that makes it difficult for students to gain mastery before the test. This is rather unfortunate as it may cripple most students to perform poorly in the practical exams. The findings of this study interestingly are an indicative that importance has been attached to the practical skill development. Although, performance has not improved significantly, it seems logical to discuss the need to improve the quality of the music practical skills at the senior High School level.

In line with the 100% agreement of all the teachers to include practical performance test to the music at the SHS level, greater percentage agree that failure in the practical performance test has a negative impact on the overall grade of the candidate. The practical test is 50 marks out of 200 marks and they were of the view that candidates cannot afford to fail the practical test. The reasons given, notwithstanding in addition is that unless the candidate works extra hard, getting a credit pass will be very difficult if one fails the practical aspect. In all the hypotheses, the teachers overwhelmingly responded that the practical examination should be improved and facilities put in place as that will help students get good grades. Examiners

among them agreed unanimously (100%) that the practical performance test is easy to score, once you do your technical exercises, play your pieces well and sight read the unseen pieces.

One important factor that music teachers reiterated to have caused poor performance in the practical examinations is the poor musicality of the students enrolled to take the music programme. In Ghana, music at the Junior High School is non-existent. Apart from the little knowledge in music obtained in the Creative Arts subject at the primary school, the students don't get any knowledge before entering the SHS to read music. Music at the JHS is dead due to its non-examinable status and since headmasters think about examination results greatly, they frown upon the subject, Music. The subject music is not done at the Junior High School at all and that does not expose them to rudiments and basic skills in instrument playing. Like Flolu (2003, p.65) asserts, "Instrumental music playing should begin with what the children usually play on the instruments". Flolu talks about inculcating instrumental music into the pupils at the basic level but the truth is that the subject is not taught at all in most Ghanaian Junior High schools. JHS graduates are then admitted to the Senior High School to begin to learn rudiments before using that concept to attempt any available instrument. The foundation is therefore always poor at the basic level. Okafor (2007) had this to say about Nigeria Music Education:

Music cannot be separated from culture, therefore Nigerian music education should be designed in such a way that our musical culture can be enhanced and fully incorporated into the curriculum of schools while the aspect of Western culture should be used to complement that of Nigerian culture. It is imperative, therefore, when planning music curriculum for any society to ensure that such a plan reflects the cultural heritage of the society(Okafor, 2007, p. 155).

This situation is similar in Ghana as the place of music in the basic curriculum is not well defined. It is a challenge as far as Music at the SHS level and the tertiary level are concerned. Additionally, reasons were given that the pairing of the subjects at the secondary schools forcibly make some students in the General Arts Programme do music unwillingly. Some



students don't have the interest at all so practicing their instruments is out. It is when examination approaches that they are forced to do something. This is an unfortunate situation. The foundational level at the Junior High school level is important to build some of these practical skills in the students before senior High School. Gardiner (2003) observes in this regard that:

Music education is an extremely rich kind of experience in the sense that it requires cognition, emotion and aesthetics. It develops performance skills and individual capabilities. These qualities have to be developed, synchronized and integrated to enable the learner in music education to discover the interrelatedness between music and history, music and mathematics, music and social studies, music and political science; music and languages, as well as music and philosophy” Gardiner (2003, p.65).

It will be very important to give music a regular place in the Junior High school curriculum because from the point of view of Nketia (1999, p.11), “Music is not only a field of enjoyment but an area that lends itself to discipline and training of the mind. It is also a field of cultural knowledge and artistic behaviour to which all children must be exposed”. This is logic to strengthen the foundations of music to the young ones before studying it at the Senior High school level. A systematic instruction is required of any subject in the curriculum that is learnt beyond the rudimentary level (Hoffer, 1993, p.5), and Music is no exception.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper demonstrates that poor practical performance in music at the Senior High School level is due to the following factors: Absence of music studies at the Junior High School level, lack of compromise of some headmasters with the music teachers in terms of provision of music facilities, employment of music teachers with no practical background. Most headmasters of the secondary schools offering music do not attach much importance to the subject and therefore fail to allocate classrooms or acquire the needed instruments for the music students. The paper similarly highlights that the examiner status of the teachers has

nothing to do with performance of students in the practical areas. It affirms that most music teachers do not teach the practical lessons but concentrate on the other two components. This may be due to the lack of practical skills of the music teachers. It can be concluded from this study that students perform poorly since WAEC does not make the pieces available on time for the schools. The paper shows that music performance skills are better option which can provide employable skills to the students. Performing poorly in it will rather be a disincentive to other students who will like to take it as a major course. It is a gainsaying that the practical aspect touches on all domains of learning, including the psychomotor domain (the development of skills), the cognitive domain (the acquisition of knowledge), and the affective domain, which includes appreciation and sensitivity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To this end the paper contend to maintain that since music performance test cannot be done away as much as West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) are concerned, set pieces for the practical performance should be made available on the WAEC website where students and teachers can get access to download and study them before the examination. Possibly, printed versions can be mailed to the schools by the WAEC subject officers to enable all the schools get access to the pieces.

It is also proffered headmasters need to look for assistance from the government and other stake holders to provide enough musical instruments to allow the students choose instruments areas they can function most. Appeals can be made through Non-Governmental agencies to import more instruments at subsidised prices to enable parents buy them for their wards. The knowledge gained at the Senior High School level is foundational and it is important that the requisite facilities are available for the students to build a strong foundation for music practical performance. This will go a long way to enhance their knowledge during practical.

Similarly, it is recommended that government and employers of music teachers consider the practical abilities of the music teachers who can teach, direct and develop the practical skills of the students. Music teachers who will allow the students to discover their practical abilities and natural endowments should be considered most for employment. This is because the process of learning how to play an instrument involves the systematic development of specific skills that are necessary for properly using the instrument (Schleuter, 1996), and this can be done by practically oriented music teachers. This will help adulate the practical performance test as organised by the West African Examinations Council.

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