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Re-thinking inclusivity in music learning: The implications of Multiple Ghanaian Languages in Western-leaning

Music theory



Re-thinking inclusivity in music learning: The implications of multiple Ghanaian languages in Western-leaning music theory

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Abstract

This study explores the feasibility of incorporating Ghanaian languages into music theory and composition curricula that are mostly focused on Western traditions. It recognises the benefits and challenges associated with this endeavour. The study utilises a mixed-methods approach, acknowledging the necessity of incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data to comprehensively evaluate the various ramifications of this educational This approach enables a comprehensive comprehension of the cultural and cognitive effects, as well as the practical aspects of implementation. Integrating Ghanaian languages into the curriculum can improve cultural significance and student involvement, but research indicates that it should be done with care. The potential adverse impacts on standardised musical terminology and international communication necessitate thoughtful deliberation, promoting gradual incorporation rather than a total departure from English. Additional research is essential to investigate obstacles and devise efficient techniques for integrating Ghanaian languages into existing musical structures without compromising them. This study emphasises the necessity of adopting a wellrounded strategy that promotes the gradual incorporation of Ghanaian languages into music education, while still preserving the advantages of the existing English-based system.

Introduction

This paper aims to examine the incorporation of indigenous languages into music theory curricula in Ghana. The paper bases its rationale with references to Mensah et al. (2023), ResCue and van Pinxteren (2023), and Ankrah et al. (2022). Pourbaix et al. (2023) and Khan et al. (2023) have separately examined the difficulties associated with multilingual education, which has a historical single language, and a Western point of view have historically examined the possibilities and difficulties of integrating Ghana's varied languages into conventional music theory curricula.

The justification for this inquiry lies in the cultural importance, advancement of inclusivity, and enhancement of pedagogical approaches. The linguistic diversity in Ghana serves as a valuable source of cultural knowledge that has the potential to enrich music instruction. Ansah et al. (2022) argue that music has the potential to revitalise minority languages and enhance cultural comprehension. This claim is substantiated by language surveys conducted in Ghana that advocate the use of music as a means of revitalising languages. Experts recommend that connecting linguistically can improve

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understanding and enjoyment of Western music theory when taught in a way that considers students' cultural origins, fosters inclusivity, and reflects the variety of the nation (Fava, 2016)

Nevertheless, integrating many Ghanaian languages into Western music theory encounters substantial challenges, especially due to the lack of standardised music theory terminology across Ghana's linguistic landscape. Music theory is based on precise terminology that is difficult to translate, which raises issues about the uniformity of training. However, incorporating foreign linguistic elements into a language is not unmanageable. Incorporating loanwords from foreign languages has proven to be a pragmatic strategy, enriching the lexicon and easing cross-disciplinary and cross-linguistic communication (Spahiu & Nuredini, 2023; Feruza, 2023). In Ghana, upholding Western music theory terminology and incorporating these terms into local languages is essential. This ensures the existence of a shared global vocabulary, which is essential for students to participate actively in global interactions.

Alternatively, researchers such as Bellés-Calvera (2018), Christensen (2018) and Cram (2009) propose that music theory should be taught in English for practical reasons, such as achieving uniformity, accessing resources, and adhering to global standards. Employing the English language diminishes linguistic obstacles, guaranteeing an unambiguous understanding crucial for global prospects. While there are concerns regarding the loss of cultural identity, including local music samples and cultural contexts in the curriculum can help alleviate these issues. A curriculum solely focusing on Ghanaian languages may isolate Ghanaian students from their international music community.

A brief account of music education in Ghana

Music education in Ghana is shaped by the academic traditions of the Western world and the country's distinctive cultural past. The integration of Western music theory can be attributed to the colonial period and the influence of British education (Amuzu, 2022; Mawusi & Klutse, 2023). Post-colonial Ghana persisted in employing Western pedagogical methods, encountering challenges in relevancy as they did not connect with the country's indigenous musical traditions. Eminent individuals such as Ephraim Amu and J.H. Kwabena Nketia fought for the incorporation of African music traditions, laying the groundwork for a holistic approach that honours Ghana's musical legacy (Acquah et al., 2022; Harper & Opoku-Boateng, 2019).

However, it must also be noted that the scarcity of academic resources in Ghanaian languages is a barrier to inclusive teaching. Investing in developing local academic resources can help close the divide between Western concepts and Ghanaian traditions, thereby improving the educational setting. Also, achieving a harmonious blend of Western music theory and Ghanaian languages necessitates meticulous planning to uphold academic rigour and cultural significance. The process entails adapting and reinterpreting Western theoretical concepts to align with Ghanaian customs and traditions. Although valuable, the current framework of Western-oriented music theory has limitations when applied to the diverse musical landscape of Ghana.

Case studies on language incorporation

Global case studies offer significant insights into effectively integrating Indigenous languages into a predominantly international curriculum, which can guide Ghana in introducing Indigenous languages into music theory schools.

Wales has consistently advocated for bilingual education, instructing in both Welsh and English to foster a bilingual society. The government promotes the Welsh language via education and resources, producing bilingual pupils who experience cognitive advantages and enhanced cultural comprehension (Thomas et al., 2022; Rosiak, 2022).

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New Zealand's educational system has instituted "Kura Kaupapa Māori" to address language extinction by immersing students in the Māori language and incorporating its cultural ideas into conventional academic topics. This program has resulted in enhanced academic performance among Māori students and a rejuvenation of Māori culture (Wang, 2023; Lemon et al., 2023).

In Quebec, Canada, where French is predominant, provincial regulations require immigrant parents to register their children in French-language schools and require French to be the major language in businesses with a minimum number of employees. These efforts adeptly reconcile the necessity for global communication with preserving the French language and culture, even though many people also acquire English proficiency (Martin, 2024; Stojanov, 2022; McRoberts, 2013).

India's linguistic variety requires an educational system that supports numerous languages. States may integrate local languages into the curriculum in conjunction with the official language and English. Tamil Nadu emphasises the Tamil language, putting the populace at ease with its cultural history while still adept in a global language (Mahapatra et al., 2023; Petrosyan et al., 2022).

Similarities to the Circumstances in Ghana

The examples here assert that these case studies can be applied as analogies to the Ghanaian situation. The illustrations underscore the significance of incorporating native languages into educational frameworks while simultaneously recognising the imperative of interacting with globally dominant languages to facilitate more extensive communication and practical implementation.

Method

In the context of this study, "method" denotes the comprehensive strategy and particular processes employed to execute the research. It encompasses the strategies, procedures, and instruments utilised to gather and analyse data to address the research enquiries.

Summary of Participants and Process

The study utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies over a lengthy period to examine the effects of teaching music theory in many languages in Ghana. Two participants were present: an experimental group that received training in indigenous languages and a control group that received traditional monolingual instruction.

- **Learners:** A total of 80 students, ranging in age from 18 to 25 and with varying skill levels, were evenly distributed between the experimental and control groups. Nevertheless, every student studied music theory for at least one to two years. Only a small number of students (about 10) had not formally studied music yet possessed a fundamental understanding due to their innate aptitude for playing a musical instrument.
- Educators: The two groups were instructed by 20 music educators, each with at least five years of experience teaching Western music theory in Ghana. The students were guaranteed high-quality instruction from recognised experts in the field, as these educators were purposively sampled for their excellence in teaching the course based on strong recommendations from the institutions where they teach.
- Curriculum Developers: 5 experienced music curriculum developers, specialising in building curricula for Ghanaian schools, contributed their skills in combining various musical languages. Over 12 weeks, both groups received instruction during their regular music theory classes. Participating educators taught the courses in their respective schools.

The selection criterion incorporated stratified sampling to assure adequate representation across linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. Ethics, approval, and consent were obtained

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following institutional policies. Pupils' anonymity is preserved for the duration of the study and publication.

The data collection procedures involved pre-tests and post-tests designed to assess music theory proficiency. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and participant observation, among other ethnographic methods such as focus group discussions, document analysis and field notes to depict the actual experiences of educators and students as they transitioned to a multilingual curriculum. The quantitative analysis incorporated sophisticated statistical modellings such as linear mixed models, hierarchical linear modelling and growth curve analysis to control for potential confounding factors and individuals' baseline differences. The qualitative data gathered from interviews, observations, and focus groups was managed and analysed using NVivo software.

Coding and Theme Development

Here, coding denotes the systematic categorisation and organisation of qualitative data, including interview transcripts, observations, and field notes, to discern essential themes, patterns, and concepts. It entails deconstructing the data into smaller pieces (codes) that signify various concepts or themes arising from the data.

Theme development entails recognising overarching patterns and significances within the coded data to construct cohesive themes that encapsulate the primary results of the investigation. These themes elucidate the primary topics, concerns, or insights extracted from the data and offer a systematic approach to presenting the study's findings.

- Open Coding: Initially, open coding was implemented to identify overarching themes that emerged from the data, including "cultural relevance," "language barriers," and "musical identity."
- **Axial Coding**: Axial coding was employed to refine and organise these broad themes into categories, thereby identifying the relationship between concepts. For instance, the theme of "cultural relevance" was associated with sub-themes such as "enhanced learning" and "connection to heritage."
- **Selective Coding**: Selective classification was employed to identify core themes that connected the data, thereby establishing a cohesive narrative regarding the influence of language integration on music education.
- **Data Visualization**: The qualitative findings were more effectively illustrated by utilising NVivo's visualisation tools, including cluster analysis and word clouds, to identify patterns and relationships within the data.

Intervention

In this instance, intervention refers to the alteration implemented in the teaching approach to evaluate its impact on the study's results.

Control Group: The control group was instructed in Western music theory following the current curriculum implemented in Ghanaian educational institutions. This curriculum primarily emphasises developing creative composition skills, the ability to analyse music in a few cultural contexts, and four-part harmony interspersed with melody writing. This is achieved through written tests, aural analysis assignments, and performance assessments while incorporating textbooks and workbooks.

Experimental Group: The experimental group's curriculum was modified to incorporate the Ghanaian language into music theory teaching. The selection of participants was centred on students with a profound understanding of this language to guarantee the accumulation of authentic and precise data for this research. As mentioned, the course outline contains no differences from the

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control group. It also utilised manuals and workbooks in the English language, while the instruction was primarily in the selected local language, with loan words in music theory interspersed.

Triangulation was implemented to enhance the method's dependability. Qualitative analyses underwent inter-rater reliability tests, and methodological triangulation was implemented by comparing findings from various data sources.

Ethical considerations governed the study's execution, guaranteeing the confidentiality of respondents and ensuring that participation was entirely voluntary. The study ensured that all participants provided informed consent by being thoroughly briefed on the research objectives, the intended use of the data gathered, and their right to disengage from the study at any time without facing any negative repercussions. Data was anonymised to safeguard the identities of the institutions and individuals involved. The necessary ethical approval was acquired from the appropriate institutional review bodies.

Results

In this context, the term "results" denotes the discoveries obtained through the execution of the experimental design, which comprised two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The results provide a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from both groups to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum intervention. Specifically, the experimental group implemented a Ghanaian language-based approach to teaching music theory, while the control group implemented a standard Western music theory curriculum.

1. Experimental Design and Implementation:

• **Groups:** The study employed a two-group design with participants randomly assigned to either a control group (n=40 students, ten music educators) or an experimental group (n=40 students, ten music educators). Five music curriculum developers participated in developing materials for the experimental group but did not deliver instruction.

2. Outcome Measures and Data Collection:

Both groups were administered pre- and post-intervention assessments to assess the
impact of the curriculum modifications. These assessments measured understanding of
four-part harmony in everyday practice, the ability to analyse music in different cultural
contexts, and creative composition skills using a combination of written tests, aural analysis
tasks, and performance assessments. Additionally, student participants conducted semistructured interviews before and after the intervention to gather qualitative data on their
perceptions of the curriculum and musical identities.

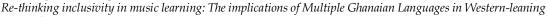
Operationalizing Curriculum Modifications: A Detailed Account

Implementing and delineating the specific modifications to the music curriculum for the groups is referred to as Operationalising Curriculum Modifications: A Detailed Account. It outlines the implementation and evaluation of the intervention, conducted using Ghanaian language and examples in conjunction with Western music theory, through meticulously designed pre- and post-intervention assessments.

Pre- and Post-Intervention Assessments: The control and experimental groups underwent pre- and post-intervention evaluations designed to evaluate any modifications in their comprehension and use of music theory principles. The assessments consisted of three essential elements:

1. Understanding of Four-Part Harmony: The students' knowledge of four-part harmony, a fundamental aspect of Western tonal music, was assessed through written exercises and aural analysis assignments. The excerpts featured chosen sections from J.S. Bach chorales, which

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exemplify the widely accepted principles of harmony and adaptations of traditional Ghanaian folk songs harmonised by Ghanaian composers utilising Western and Indigenous methods. This facilitated a direct evaluation of harmonic practices across different musical cultures.

- 2. Analysing Diverse Music Styles: Aural analysis exercises incorporated musical examples to evaluate students' capacity to analyse music within various cultural contexts. Students examined extracts from Western art music, such as a passage from a piano sonata by Mozart, Ghanaian highlife music, such as a song by E.T. Mensah, and a modern Western pop song. Students analysed each piece, identifying crucial musical elements such as melodic contour, rhythmic patterns, and harmonic progressions. They utilised both Western musical terminology and, when appropriate, comparable terms from Ghanaian musical traditions (in the experimental group).
- **3.** Creative Composition Skills: The testing of students' creative composition skills involved performance tests in which they created and performed brief compositions for voice and percussion. The composition prompts encouraged the use of musical elements from both Western and Ghanaian traditions. For example, a particular challenge required students to create a composition that combines the rhythmic framework of a specific Ghanaian dancing rhythm with the harmonic progression commonly seen in Western pop music. The objective of this work was for pupils to combine their knowledge of many musical components to create a unified and unique piece.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Furthermore, alongside the quantitative evaluations, semi-structured interviews were carried out with student participants before and during the intervention. The interviews investigated the students' views on the changes made to the curriculum, their encounters with Western and Ghanaian musical traditions, and any observed influence on their musical identities.

This study seeks to provide a precise and reproducible description of the intervention's execution by offering detailed information about the exact musical examples and assessment tasks used. This comprehensive explanation facilitates a more subtle comprehension of how the curriculum alterations were implemented and offers a more extensive framework for interpreting the study's results.

Data Analysis and Findings

Quantitative analysis of the pre-and post-test scores revealed a statistically significant difference (p < 0.05) in the experimental group's understanding of four-part harmony, demonstrating a more nuanced grasp of both Western and Ghanaian approaches (in language) as far as harmonic sonorities such as the proper use of motions and chordal progressions, cadences, the understanding of antecedence and consequence in phrasal structures, African harmonic sonorities such as melodic doubling or parallelism are concerned. While the control group showed some improvement, it was not statistically significant. Furthermore, the experimental group demonstrated significantly greater improvement (p < 0.01) in their ability to analyse music in different cultural contexts, indicating a broadened musical perspective. No statistically significant differences were found between groups in creative composition skills.

Qualitative analysis of the student interviews revealed that students in the experimental group reported a greater appreciation for music theory and composition and felt more confident in their ability to analyse music from diverse cultures. They expressed pride in seeing their cultural heritage (using the Ghanaian language) reflected in the curriculum. While demonstrating engagement with the material, students in the control group expressed different shifts in their perception of musical diversity.

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These examples highlight the experimental group's enhanced understanding of harmonic sonorities and their broadened perspective on music from diverse cultural contexts.

Harmonic Sonorities: Western and Ghanaian Approaches

The research examined the influence of language on music creation by comparing an experimental group instructed in the Ghanaian language with a control group. The experimental group demonstrated a distinctive incorporation of Ghanaian harmonic techniques in their compositions, especially in their melodic approach, which highlighted antecedence and consequence. The quality of compositions significantly differed across various rhythmic frameworks, whereas the control group's outputs were akin to hymns. Both groups exhibited comparable melodic quality and cadence; however, the experimental group revealed a more profound comprehension of the course ideas, encompassing cultural variation in music instruction. Although all groups excelled in four-part writing, the study uncovered nuanced distinctions linked to the language of instruction. The experimental group exhibited more significant variation in harmonic selections and inventive melodic frameworks, in contrast to the control group's hymn-like uniformity. Though not exclusively Western, their harmonic language exhibited distinctive traits such as parallel vocal leading.

The study sought to investigate the correlation between language and compositional decisions while recognising the necessity for more research to separate language from cultural influences and previous musical experiences. Critics could contend that the relationship between language and composing choices is fundamental, overlooking the intricacies of musical education and the impact of prior experiences. They could also highlight the subjectivity in evaluating musical styles and the possible influence of the instructor's preferences.

However, this study indicates that language may influence musical perception and creativity while highlighting the necessity for more stringent controls over extraneous variables and bigger sample sizes to achieve more trustworthy conclusions. The findings suggest that instructing music in students' native Ghanaian language may cultivate a culturally attuned learning atmosphere, strengthening their connection to their ancestry and impacting their compositional style.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer strong evidence that incorporating Ghanaian language(s) into music theory curricula primarily focused on Western music can substantially affect student learning. The group exposed to a curriculum that included the Twi language had a more profound comprehension of theoretical topics than the group that did not have this exposure. This distinction is seen in their statistically substantial advancements on exams evaluating the understanding of intricate musical concepts. The experimental group's favourable outcome indicates language's capacity as a potent instrument for accessing musical comprehension. These pupils can establish a more intuitive and significant connection with abstract musical concepts by acquiring knowledge through the selected Ghanaian language intricately linked to their cultural heritage. This correlation is probably manifested in their heightened capacity to analyse various musical genres, indicating that their education in their mother tongue cultivated a more comprehensive and all-encompassing comprehension of music.

Additional examination of the learning experiences of the experimental group could provide insight into the precise processes by which language integration supported their growth. Did utilising the selected language facilitate their comprehension of intricate musical compositions more easily? Did it enhance one's comfort and confidence in dealing with theoretical concepts? One can gain crucial insights into the intricacies of language's impact on musical learning by employing qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups.

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Furthermore, thoroughly analysing the experimental group's compositional output could uncover how their distinct learning experience influenced their creative expressions. Did their familiarity with the language influence their compositions regarding specific stylistic choices or preferences? Analysing their work for Ghanaian musical idioms or aesthetic principles could offer additional proof of the significant interaction between language, culture, and musical expression.

By further analysing the experimental group's performance and experiences, future research can expand on this study's findings and develop a more detailed understanding of how language integration can be successfully used to create a more inclusive and enriching musical learning environment for all students.

Ultimately, this study highlights the crucial significance of language in enhancing students' comprehension of music theory when it is carefully incorporated into the curriculum. Integrating Ghanaian languages, like Twi, Ewe, Ga, or others, within a primarily Western music theory framework improves cognitive understanding and promotes a more profound and culturally significant learning experience. The observed advantages in the experimental group's performance indicate that students studying a language that connects with their cultural identities may better intuitively understand abstract musical concepts. This, in turn, promotes both analytical and creative development.

Investigating the broader consequences of these results in the future is crucial. By examining the impact of including native languages in music education on students' composition and performance, educators can cultivate teaching practices more attuned to cultural diversity. Moreover, it is essential to comprehend the precise ways in which language assists in clarifying intricate musical concepts, as this will be vital in improving teaching approaches. This research provides opportunities for developing a music curriculum that is more inclusive and diverse. It aims to not only protect but also honour the extensive cultural legacy that is intertwined with language. To cater to a more diverse student population, educational institutions are incorporating native languages into academic subjects such as music theory. This serves as an effective method for connecting different cultures and improving the entire educational experience. The convergence of language, culture, and music offers a promising area for future investigation, with the capacity to revolutionise how music is instructed and comprehended in multicultural environments across the globe.

Language selection based on demographics

Another viable approach to proficiently instructing students in Western music theory and composition using Ghanaian languages is to consider the students' linguistic demographics and select the languages most widely comprehended for teaching purposes besides English. Utilising prominent Ghanaian languages such as Akan, Ewe, or Ga has the potential to improve communication and facilitate learning.

Several factors are crucial for achieving successful bilingual education in Ghana:

- 1. **Government Support**: Robust government endorsement and regulations are imperative to enforce bilingual education, guaranteeing adequate resources, infrastructure, and legal aid.
- 2. **Educational Infrastructure**: Schools require language laboratories, libraries with multiple local languages, and digital resources.
- 3. **Teacher Preparation:** Substantial investment in training programs is necessary to ensure educators possess the necessary skills and expertise in bilingual instruction.
- 4. **Community Engagement:** The acceptance and integration of local languages rely heavily on the support of linguistic communities and families.

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- 5. **Curriculum Design:** A culturally appropriate curriculum following international music education standards should be created. This curriculum should be developed with the input of linguists, music theorists, ethnomusicologists, educators, and curriculum specialists.
- 6. Pilot initiatives can evaluate the strategy's feasibility and offer insights for expansion, while continuous monitoring and assessment aid in refining the system.

Using English in music theory education is advantageous as it enables global communication with a broader range of scholarly and professional contacts. It also adheres to international academic standards and equips students with crucial language skills for global opportunities.

Implementing a hybrid methodology that combines the use of both Ghanaian and English languages in music theory instruction is both feasible and advantageous. Establishing connections between intricate concepts and familiar cultural allusions improves students' comprehension, following worldwide efforts to promote decolonisation and inclusivity. This necessitates catering to diverse linguistic communities, establishing uniform terminology in indigenous languages, offering language instruction, and developing materials in multiple languages.

Insights and execution

Strategic incorporation of indigenous languages in music theory education can foster national identity while preparing students for global engagement. This requires community engagement, resource allocation, and continuous evaluation and revision.

In the future, it is vital to prioritise the establishment of a peaceful equilibrium between international academic benchmarks and the safeguarding and commemorating Ghana's linguistic and cultural legacy. By carefully planning, judiciously allocating resources, and actively engaging the community, Ghanaian educational institutions have the potential to establish a music pedagogy model that is both globally applicable and rooted in the local context. Alternatively, it is appropriate to maintain the use of the English language in teaching music theory.

Conclusion

This study examines the incorporation of Ghanaian languages and musical concepts into Western-centric music theory curricula. It reveals notable enhancements in students' analytical abilities through a revised curriculum that merges Twi with Western classical traditions. The experimental group demonstrated improved capabilities in analysing various musical genres, indicating that integrating linguistic and cultural diversity can augment conceptual comprehension and practical proficiency in music instruction.

Further research is required to evaluate this integration's long-term consequences and limitations; however, the findings support transcending a mostly Western-centric approach in Ghana. Educators may foster a more inclusive and effective educational environment by incorporating Indigenous languages and musical traditions. Ongoing collaboration among educators, policymakers, linguists, and musicians is crucial for the efficacy of bilingual and multilingual music education. The study underscores the necessity of accounting for students' language proficiency in linguistically varied regions since an excessive focus on a singular language may diminish cultural legacy and restrict students' involvement in music theory.

Pilot projects assessing the influence of local languages on Western music theory instruction and targeted teacher training are essential for promoting cultural diversity and improving global competitiveness in music education.

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