Experiential Knowledge as a Musical Resource

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Abstract
Historically, music pedagogy has witnessed the implementation of diverse teaching models in different educational settings. Within the academic realm, for example, music theory and instrumental training approaches have been developed to align with standardized curricula, considering the diverse musical histories and cultures across the globe. Even so, there is a growing trend among individuals to explore alternative modes of instruction beyond traditional school environments. These alternative methods encompass online platforms and one-on-one in-person tutoring, among other options. Such modalities have prompted recognition of exponents who provide music tutorage having not acquired formal music training but possess knowledge through lived experience. Their practically inclined teaching approaches and demonstration of musical artistry have sparked interest in people, who subsequently aspire to learn music and play instruments. Their efforts have played a crucial role in fostering the need for music education in the music domain and the entire art industry. In doing so, they establish a prominent presence in music pedagogy, and consequently, in formal educational settings. Considering this, I examine the contributions by such educators within the music industry, particularly in the field of education. Using qualitative case study methods such as interviews, I explored different non-formal pedagogical approaches and interrogated their impact on learners. Insights from these interviews revealed that observation, replication, and innovation are utilized as instructional approaches in non-formal settings, with students studying under peers, master musicians, and family members. Through this, students acquire musical exposure as they develop skills that align with the music industry. Such training ought to be integrated into academic curricula to enhance music scholarship and ensure its relevance locally and within global contexts.

Introduction

"Whilst formal music education has become increasingly available and diverse in content, it has not managed to stem the ebbing tide of involvement in music-making…those societies and communities with the most highly developed formal music education systems often appear to contain the least active music-making populations" (Green, 2002, p. 5). Green's observation captures the stand of majority of global music industries. It suggests a disconnect between the traditional music academy and the music market, whereby, formal schooling does not cultivate music proficiency effectively as expected even with its accessibility and diversity in content. Hence, there is a need for music tutoring

that facilitates experiential learning, enabling students to immerse themselves in the music industry standards. Addressing such an education, Green's statement implies that there are approaches outside of formal institutions that produce most musicking individuals. Green (2002, p.5) refers to these acts as informal music learning practices since they take place in non-formal environments (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010); that is, outside schools and institutions that encompass primary and secondary schools and universities, among others (Mak, 2006). According to Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010), these activities, which are interactive, non-linear, and self-directed, lead to the formation of non-traditional social learning settings. Such environments are preferred by various musicians since they are highly contextualised, participatory, purposeful, and incidental (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010; Mak, 2006). They exude implicit and explicit results where the learner verbalises and demonstrates what they know and performs effectively depending on the context. Learning is, therefore, experiential (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Non-formal settings are also considered flexible and student-centred compared to formal traditional contexts. In this case, the academic is perceived as rigid and decontextualised from the learner since students act and think according to standardised practices (Dewey, 1997; Schyff, 2017). Additionally, the curriculum and content are more inclined towards the government and the institution's demands, goals and objectives than the learner's (Dib, 1988). Supporting this perception, Robinson (2012) explains how two musicians pursued music through informal strategies after discontinuing formal music training, which, they discovered, was not aligned with their goals. Schyff (2017) also addresses this using his experience. He describes how he acquired much of his musical knowledge outside academic spaces in self-directed ensembles and communities of creative musicians (p.3). Similar situations are presented by Brook et al. (2017) and Brook et al. (2019), who explain how some musicians abandoned their institutionalised music classes to acquire informal music education since the formal settings were not aligned with their musical goals. These encounters allude to the inadequacy of formal education, as individuals are required to obtain additional knowledge beyond what is taught by reputable educators in conventional learning settings.

In other localities, institutional learning is grounded on Western systems that are not indigenous to them (Matambo, 2018; Mushira, 2010). Such structures are neither dynamic nor applicable to that region's industry, for they have not been contextualised to the people's way of life (Mushira, 2010). Yet, contextualising pedagogical models to the residents' moral, social, political, cultural, spiritual and environmental ambitions ensure sustainability because structures generally prevail upon people's realities (Dib, 2002, as cited in Owuor, 2008; Owuor, 2008). For instance, in Kenya, among other African nations, school systems are separated from local contexts since they are dominated by western structures, yet the nation has its own indigenous and contemporary strategies (Owuor, 2008; Mushira, 2010). To solve this problem, institutions seek to integrate indigenous and informal learning approaches to contextualise education locally. However, there are still challenges to making this successful (Owuor, 2008).

Considering the contrasting perceptions of formal and non-formal educational systems, Green's (2002) observation that formal institutions produce the least active musicking populations in contrast with informal pedagogical practices is not improbable. It is on this premise that I base my study. To understand how environments outside the academic system produce more musicking populaces and how the methods incorporated in such spaces influence various institutional and informal settings, I

interrogate the non-formal learning system.[1] The study focuses on artistes who impart musical knowledge within different settings, having studied music informally. Since such artistes are either self-taught or have had casual guidance, examining their pedagogical approaches aids in extensively interrogating learning systems outside the school setting. Individuals who have received tutorage in such contexts are also included in the study to corroborate the information provided by the artiste and explore the impact of non-formal education.

Concepts and Methodology

Feiman-Nemser's (1990) perspective on teaching provides this inquiry with five concepts that explain the conditions, principles, methods and techniques that influence teaching models and strategies. They include academic, personal, critical, technological, and practical orientations. Academic orientation is primarily focused on providing knowledge and developing understanding. In this case, the teacher is considered knowledgeable in a particular field or subject. Scientific and cultural information facts and other aspects related to a particular field and their correlations are expounded to develop understanding (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Oliver, 2004). Personal orientation is associated with an individual's development. It is based on the teacher's learning experience, which is transformed into an educative resource. Critical orientation is centred on the teacher being a social critic, political activist, and educator (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Oliver, 2004). The teacher recognises the importance of formal or institutional education; at the same time, they underline the inequalities that schools preserve. Technological orientation focuses on acquiring knowledge and skills in preparation for teaching. The learner obtains theoretical and practical knowledge, whose abilities and skills are measured in terms of performance. Practical orientation emphasises skill and technique, creativity and artistry. Here, teaching and learning occur through hands-on experience, general exposure, and induction into the community of practitioners. Teaching modes such as apprenticeship and practice, among others, are incorporated. The concepts are applied to discuss how various pedagogic practices and strategies impact learners and artiste-educators in non-formal settings.

Feiman-Nemser's concepts are also encompassed within Green's (2002) conceptualisation of musical enculturation. Green describes it as the attainment of musical knowledge and skills where an individual immerses themselves in day-to-day musicking in one's social setting. It involves exploring sound by playing, listening, and composing through voice and instruments, among other objects. Enculturation is employed when discussing how the artiste-educators acquire musical knowledge and skills to impart to students. It is also applied to describe situations where learners gain information in non-formal settings.

The study is qualitative, with collective cases investigated in a single geographical site (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These cases include three artiste-educators who have garnered musical skills through informal practices and who teach using their experience as a resource, as well as three learners who have acquired musical knowledge in non-formal settings and have interacted with such educators. Through typical case technique, the artistes and learners were purposefully sampled to present

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[1] In this study, non-formal learning describes the process of acquiring knowledge outside the structured school system. Learning may occur through individual study and practice, apprenticeship, on online platforms, and within societal groups and organizations among others.

different perspectives that extensively interrogate the phenomena. The location selected was Nairobi due to its cosmopolitan nature and diversity (Oyugi, 2012). The city is also an entertainment site where musicians of different styles and backgrounds converge to pursue and establish their musical careers. Therefore, comprehensive data on artiste-educators, non-formal musical environments and learners within these contexts is available. Data was collected through interviews with the participants, where interview schedules were used to collect information.

Non-formal Learning Experience

Numerous non-formal strategies have been used to acquire musical skills and knowledge. Green (2002) discusses how musicians study music informally by involving themselves in musical practices within their social environment. Within these settings, artistes learn from different musicking communities like their peers, family and other societal members, and professional creatives. They also learn by watching, imitating and referencing recordings and live performances. From that, they acquire self-learning techniques and develop their skills independently.

Peer-learning

In non-formal settings, peer learning is prevalent, where musicians interact in their environment and learn from each other (Green, 2002). Two study participants explained how they attained skills from their peers. Njoora, a catholic choral music trainer, says that he learnt music by immersing himself in choral activities at school. His interest in music prompted him to join the institution's Catholic Student Association (CSA) choir in his first year. He cites that the learning system in CSA encouraged peer instruction where music was "passed down like culture" (Njoora, personal interview, 2023).

> So, there was the first class of music which was established a long time ago. Those who learned it taught the following music class: Two or three people would volunteer and collaborate to teach the next class and so on. After learning, we would train the church choir; you would not train alone. We would meet before choir practice; each person had to train. We would go through all voices and correct each other's mistakes. If any mishaps happened during the practice session, there would always be someone to correct them. It was a good way to sharpen your conducting skills and how you read notes [sheet music]. (Njoora, 2023)

Njoora's account illustrates the concept of peer learning by drawing parallels to indigenous learning systems that the students are already acquainted with. He highlights the intergenerational transmission of music knowledge where older students who received music education outside the conventional school curriculum teach the newer students. The process continues as the knowledge is passed down to young students who join the university's Catholic Student Association. This structure mirrors the traditional apprenticeship system in various African societies where music and other cultural knowledge and practices were orally transmitted from generation to generation (Mauwa, 2020).

In another case, JT, a multi-instrumentalist, educator, and music producer who also began his musical journey on campus, mentions that he learned music through peer instruction and active participation in the school band.

> I learnt by observing. I would go to the band room early and practice. Then, during band practice, I would watch, and watch, and watch and then practice the next day. (JT, personal interview, 2023)

He also explains how he acquired music skills by observing and asking some of the band members to share their expertise with him. He states:

> Max [a band member] taught me 1-4-5 [a chord progression from one of the songs that was being performed in the band room]. He just told me, 'Here is the guitar; this is 1-4-5.' When I played that, flowing with the song, he said, 'Now you can play the guitar.' I didn't know the key. I later learnt that the song was in G sharp. Since I had a passion for music, I watched how others played and practised. That's how I learnt, basically. In two weeks, I was okay. I could play with the rest [referring to band musicians].

Like Njoora, JT was mentored by his peers. However, he supplemented his education with observation; attentively observing other band students and assimilating their actions into his training. JT's tutelage was primarily self-directed since his tutors were also learning. Consequently, they taught him the songs they had mastered, urging him to persist in his learning and expand upon his newly acquired skills.

In the two scenarios, dual orientations emerge: technological and practical. The former can be perceived in both cases, where Njoora was oriented to teach other interested musicians and train choral groups for church activities, including animating the masses. JT was trained to accompany songs in the school band and eventually in professional bands. JT's case also presents practical educational strategies where he observed, imitated, practised, and applied what he saw as he played with the band. Through hands-on experience and exposure, he developed his instrumental playing skills, which continually influence his musical career.

Learning from family and close societal members

Apart from peer-learning, musicians gain information from family members and other societal members within their environment (Green, 2002). In this study, performing artistes like Ajo and Frank first encountered music through societal members like parents, relatives, and musicians from their local region. Ajo, a recording artiste, states that he was introduced to music in the church choir where his mother was a member.

Narrating his story, Ajo recalls:

> When I was a kid, my mother sang in the choir. She would give me her choir books to transcribe songs and, later, lend her friends the book and the copies. I would sing as I wrote these songs since they were familiar church songs. I would look at the songs and note how a song is structured; 'this is how they write it; this how they sing.' So, from that, I learnt how to structure a song. (Ajo, personal interview, 2023)

By regularly interacting with church music, Ajo obtained his first informal lesson. At a young age, he developed self-teaching skills, which aided his understanding of song structures. Developing and attaining such skills and information established his musical journey, given that he later applied these and other aspects he learnt to his musical life. As I interacted with Ajo, he mentioned that the first works he wrote were influenced by the church songs he transcribed and sang. The current ones are based on the diverse repertoire that he listens to. These songs are grounded in the self-learning skills he acquired and developed at a young age. For instance, Ajo mentioned that he strives to analyse most of the songs he listens to and the concerts he attends to understand the musical genres, the songwriting and performance styles being incorporated, the structures utilised and other musical elements.

Frank, a church music director and educator, first acquired musical lessons in church where he was taught by a reverend (clergy). Later, he developed his skills through self-learning techniques (Green, 2002).

> Rev [church reverend] taught me music in church; that's where I started. I learnt the rest through personal practice and developing my skills independently, but that is only for the keyboard. As for the other instruments, I've learnt on my own; like the guitar, it's self-taught, where you go do your things. Someone shows you one chord; you discover others little by little. When practising, I would pick a song, learn the progression and the flow of the song; then I would try to play it on my own with the instruments… yeah. (Frank, personal interview, 2023)

Similar to Ajo, Frank was personally oriented toward gaining knowledge by interacting with individuals close to him. In his case, the reverend, whom he knew from a young age, provided a foundation for him to establish his musical career. On this basis, Frank managed to expand his musical competencies, which he currently applies as a performer, tutor, and church music director.

Informal tutorage from professional creatives

Within non-formal settings, individuals whose careers are in music provide tutorage. Whether formally or informally trained, these musicians are sought since their skills are evident. Two participants, Simon and Muthoni, were informally trained by professional musicians. Simon, a recording artist, band director, and music educator, first received musical tutorage from his father, a police officer, a professional band musician, and a priest who was also a musician.

He stated:

> My dad was a musician. He's my biggest inspiration. He taught me guitar, bass guitar, and vocals. He would tell me, 'Play like this, do this, do that.' Later, I started training in church. It was an initiative for youths. We were trained by Father Luca; he was a musician. I learnt many great things from him. He taught us theory and practicals and knew how to read notes [sheet music]. So, he passed the knowledge to us. I developed my playing. I played the bass guitar, the lead, the keyboard, and the sax [saxophone]. (Simon, personal interview, 2023)

Muthoni, a drummer, acquired skills from those more proficient in drumming, including her peers and other established musicians. She also acquired knowledge from professional musicians who offer courses.

> I learnt music theory online during COVID-19 [referring to the COVID-19 lockdown period]. When I joined Motra [a music band], Kasiva and Mathayo [popular Kenyan drummers] guided me. I learnt posture… drumming techniques. I try to talk to percussionist mentors who have been in the game for a long time. I will probably send them a track and ask them. 'I play this pattern like this; what can I do?' They sometimes send a video or an audio like, 'Here, you're supposed to play like this.' I also go to gigs, observe, and listen to them like, 'Here, they're playing it this way and in this type of music' (Muthoni, personal interview, 2023).

The two cases highlight aspects of academic strategies incorporated in informal settings. For instance, Simon developed his instrumental skills and learnt theory within a structured church system under the guidance of Father Luca, a music intellectual. Similarly, Muthoni also developed her skills within Motra Music, a band that trains and empowers female drummers. The training occurs in a particular

structure with guidance from professional percussion players. Even though these structures prevail, learning occurs informally, where students are introduced to the basics and develop their skills. As Muthoni says, "The creative world is all about commitment and self-drive." Her narrative essentially portrays that, since she continuously has to research and work on her skills independently with a few consultations. As I interacted with Simon, he mentioned that he and other individuals from the initiative formed a band that practised and performed on various platforms outside the church. The above-mentioned shows gave them experience. Simon also said that he researches and speaks to other professionals to expand his musical knowledge.

Apart from the two, JT, Ajo and Njoora have also been guided by professional musicians. Like Muthoni, Ajo developed skills in a structured group setting, but the learning was informal and did not follow a particular curriculum. Ajo learnt vocal and song arrangement techniques and performance skills from the RedFourth Chorus (a popular Kenyan choir). Therefore, apart from analysing song structures as he learnt in his younger days, he gained musical knowledge by joining a choral group that always received vocal training.

Ajo narrates:

> I remember when I met Fila [founder, RedFourth chorus], I told him, 'I am a musician, and I was wondering if you could show me the ways for an artiste.' He told me, 'You can sing, but you are rigid. But we have a mentorship programme where we practice every Saturday, and if there is an event, you will perform.' When I was there, we [the choir members] were trained to warm our vocals, dance, manage the stage, and be confident…everything a musician needs on stage. The only thing we didn't learn was the business side of it. That's how I achieved most of my vocal power; I also learnt a different way of writing a song.

Njoora supplemented his peer-taught music knowledge by learning how to play guitar online. Through self-training, he played a few basic chords. Even with a basic understanding of the instrument, Njoora admitted to encountering difficulties when trying to accompany several songs. Consequently, he sought an experienced tutor to guide him. Throughout his training, he received guidance from two instructors at separate intervals. Despite varying levels of expertise, both educators possessed valuable insights to share.

He states:

> I learned chords like G and C from YouTube. But it was not enough. I later enrolled in a face-to-face class. Due to insufficient funds, I stopped for a while. So far, I've had two teachers. The first one preferred teaching the basic chords and transposition using a capo. The second one was a mugithi[2] performer. He taught me the hardest techniques. He doesn't use a capo since he is a performer. He knows different techniques and styles on the guitar… even rumba.

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[2] Mugithi is a Kikuyu popular style that integrates gicandi, irua, and mwomboko styles, and various modern genres, and is played by a one-man guitar or a band (Muhoro, 2002).

In a different account, JT, in his pursuit of music production education, followed online classes on YouTube. Later, he was guided by Spyke, an established Kenyan music producer.

JT cites:

> I taught myself production. I started with FL (Fruity Loops), and I made some good tracks. I used to watch YouTube videos then. When I came to Nairobi, I met Spyke [a music producer], and he really helped me. He listened to what I had and would tell me, 'Here, do this, remove the bad frequencies, raise the good frequencies.' I also watched Spyke, asked how he did his mixing and mastering, and then practised what I'd seen and learnt.

Through observation, imitation and practice, JT understood music production, produced his records and taught production students. He succeeded in establishing his music production career by personally developing his musical abilities.

Teaching from experience

As discussed earlier, musicians learn through practice, watching and replicating, and from online platforms. These experiences are usually transformed into resourceful materials by music tutors, particularly artiste-educators. Because of their experience, they are considered music experts and are sought by different institutions and individuals. Frank attained his music directing and tutoring jobs due to his musical proficiency. He trains the church's praise and worship teams and teaches keyboard and guitar in and outside church. JT offers music lessons in formal institutions, music studios and music academies. His mastery of guitars, drums and keyboards and his experience as a band director, music producer, singer-songwriter and performer who plays with several groups grounded his pedagogical career. Simon teaches music theory and instrumental playing to children. Parents consider him knowledgeable due to his expertise in reading music, band training and directing, and playing several instruments. The three base their pedagogical practices on their lived experience. However, they contextualise the information according to the needs of the music industry, the learner's age, background and musical ability.

JT mentions that his lessons are "person-centred". He says:

> I work with someone's pace. If they are fast, I'll also be fast; if they're slow, I'll take them slowly. So, the curriculum is the same, but the pace is different.

When asked how he developed the curriculum, he states:

> I came up with a curriculum that is based on what I would have wanted to learn. Later, I learnt about the standardised ABRSM curriculum. I used it in one school. As for my classes, I use mine. From a practical point of view, I have performed with a band; I know what bands want and what playing with people entails, so my curriculum is rich. I also developed the children's curriculum based on what I had done before. Since I started teaching in school, I noticed that campus students are different from children. I knew what to teach, but I had to simplify it for young kids, like the basics of guitar; I teach adults how to tune, but not small children. The songs are also different, and I teach the kids simple children's songs. For the adults, I challenge them; if we've learnt fingerstyle, I choose a song that applies that.

Frank also bases his classes on the student's needs and what the setting requires. He sites that:

> I make sure they're [learners] engaged in church to build their confidence. For example, you give them a song that they really love and turn it around to teach what you want them to learn. I don't have a written curriculum; I assess my students step by step in every class. For ear training, I play notes on the keyboard; they identify. If they're not very musical, I ask them to sing out the notes. That helps them develop a musical ear.

Frank takes care of the student's theoretical and practical skills even without a written curriculum. He does this by borrowing from the formal education structure, where he consults music teachers to understand the educational structure and employ some practices to improve learning. He says:

> I went down to the basic skills of learning, like how a teacher does in class, how they start from the basics to the step, and then the next one. I borrowed from that and created my design. I also talked to other music teachers, who tell me, 'This is what we do; teach basics first, like do re mi'…you identify where they're strong and build from that. To measure their progress, I can give them an oral or written exam according to their skill level or age; I can give them practicals.

When discussing the repertoire utilised in class, he mentions:

> Content is very important to me. I select songs based on that, but if I prefer a child to write their songs, I will help them. The song can be secular, but the content must be good. Well, I'm mostly in church and I teach gospel.

Simon explains how he strategises as he tutors. He states:

> I have a music book that I use in teaching. Approximately, I have eight lessons with test papers. I teach theory, reading music, solfa notation and staff. As I teach, I incorporate my experience with a band, I research online and from people. I teach chord work, relatives, finger positions, posture, and play using pedals for practicals. But first, I make sure they learn the scales; C and G like that, all musical notes. Then I teach them how to apply; when learning how to create a song, I tell them, 'You can choose either C, F, or G and sing on that.' From that, we try a different chord, transpose, and move to another song until the palms are comfortable on the instrument. The songs that I use in class are Kenyan and international for variety.

When asked about aural and training students to identify specific chords, Simon notes:

> I give them a song that they attempt to listen. I show them tricks to identify chords through the ear. The ear has to be sharp. I start playing a song, and then I ask the learners about it. I tell them to sing it and ask them to apply what they've heard on the keyboard, and then they advance to a different level.

In these cases, the artiste-educators are considered music intellectuals who are well-versed in music. Borrowing from formal education systems, they all have written or unwritten curriculums that maintain a certain structure and ensure that learning occurs. The syllabuses, which incorporate theoretical and practical music knowledge, especially notation and local and foreign repertoire, emphasise the application of formal tutorage in non-traditional contexts. However, the formal structures are only utilised through recontextualisation, where they are adopted, re-interpreted and applied in a new informal space. By doing that, I argue that these tutors are social critics since they recognise the importance of a formal structural system. However, they incorporate informal learning

to broaden the learners' perspectives because the academic system is not self-sufficient (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Green, 2004). Using experience, they influence learners and various formal and non-formal institutions by providing new approaches to learning. For instance, even when JT has a standardised curriculum like ABRSM, he utilises his own curriculum since it comprehensively explores musicianship within the Kenyan context. Using that, he acquaints some institutions with crucial knowledge on the industry's demands, teaches new tactics that help learners immerse themselves in social musicking, and helps them establish their music careers.

Conclusion

Learning in non-formal settings occurs primarily through enculturation, where individuals engage in everyday music and musical activities within a particular social environment. Here, students learn from their peers, relatives, close members of society, and expert musicians through observing, listening, replicating, adapting and composing. By immersing themselves, they acquire experience and knowledge, which is later transformed into a resource that is utilised in their musical careers, including in education and performance. Even with diverse pedagogical strategies, non-formal learning requires elements from academic institutions that align with the social context and the student's needs. Similarly, formal institutions should integrate non-formal strategies and work with artiste-educators to contextualise the academy within the immediate society and ensure its relevance in the community. Consequently, new technologies are developed as more students value music, increasing the demand for music education. It is also recommended that research on online pedagogy be considered, seeing that many self-taught individuals use online networks to nurture their abilities and obtain knowledge.

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