

## Modes of Teaching and Learning of Indigenous Music Using Methods and Techniques Predicated on Traditional Music Education Practice: The Case of Bapedi Music Tradition

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### Abstract

This paper takes a look at music education in Bapedi society in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province in South Africa as the transmission of musico-cultural manifestations from one generation to the other. The aim is to investigate the modes of transmission of indigenous Bapedi music. Music teaching and learning in Bapedi society is an integral part of cultural and religious life, and is rich in historical and philosophical issues. Traditional music knowledge system produces a better result to the teaching and learning of indigenous music in Bapedi culture. The research question of interest that emerges is: What are the modes of transmission for indigenous Bapedi music during the teaching and learning process? The primary source for data collection was oral interviews and observations. Secondary sources include theses, books and Journal articles. Performances were recorded in the form of audio-visual recordings and photographs. The results have shown that in Bapedi society, learning music through participation has been a constant practice. The transmission process involves participation, fostering of communal sense, concentration on the present moment and the use of musico-cultural formulae and cues for interactional purposes. It was concluded that in Bapedi society, creative music making and music identity are the obverse sides of the same coin, in that the former provides an arena in which the latter can be explored.

**Keywords:** Indigenous music, transmission, modes of teaching and learning, Bapedi society, Sekhukhune, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

### Introduction

The transmission of indigenous Bapedi music can be seen as taking place through an aural-oral form of musical literacy (Lebaka 2013:57). Transmission among participants involves the transfer of knowledge and understanding between people. The article attempts to discuss, among others, the following issues, regarding the modes of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music: retention of musical ideas, story-telling, participation, listening, imitation, internalization, communal undertaking, creativity, demonstration and observation, as well as mastery. It is the contention of the author of this article that music-making in the context of this study entails social participation, social – creative interactions of practicing experience, creative artistic interpretation and mastery. The process of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music is a group activity, organized, direct and instructional. Through the processes of demonstration, listening, observation and internalization, communal undertaking and enculturation process becomes a reality and a success.

Participation in the transmission process of indigenous Bapedi music has been the most salient example of the traditional music education practice. Learning by listening is the principal and sometimes the most preferred mode of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music. It has long been of major concern among ethnomusicologists, sociologists and educators in South Africa that indigenous music has not received the same attention as mainstream music in education (Nompula 2011:1). Nompula (2011:4) believes that “through participation in group-clapping, drumming, and music interpretation through dancing, the children’s interpretative skills are developed”. She observes that as the children are afforded an opportunity to express their musical feelings through dance, they learn rhythmic patterns by rote, memorise and internalize them. Nompula (2011:5) remarks further that “indigenous music is an oral tradition that aims to transmit culture, values, beliefs and history from generation to generation”.

The article first presents a theoretical framework, discussing the terms/theories 'praxialism' and 'transformative learning', as well as the integration of multi-dimensional aspects of traditional music education practice which is a predominant feature in the transmission process of indigenous Bapedi music. This is followed by a review of previous related studies, research design and methodology. An analysis of the modes of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music using methods and techniques predicated on traditional music education practice is conducted, followed by discussion of results, and the article ends by presenting some conclusions. What will follow in the next section is a look at the theoretical framework of the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research study is based on the theory of Praxialism, as advocated by David Elliott (Elliott 1995). The study resonates well with the premises of Elliott's philosophy, namely, that 1) music education depends on the nature of music, and 2) the significance of music education depends on the significance of music in human life. The theory is relevant to this study as the study focuses on the modes of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music using methods and techniques predicated on traditional music education practice. The theory is applicable to this study because it proposes for the provision of meanings and values in actual music making and music listening in specific cultural contexts. Like in this study, the transmission process of indigenous Bapedi music provides meanings and values in actual music making and music listening in specific cultural and religious contexts, and involves a high level of music expertise including music making, listening, improvisation and creative expertise. My interpretation of Elliott's music philosophy in relation to indigenous Bapedi music context is that in the Bapedi culture, the transmission of the teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music is understood in relation to the meanings and values evidenced in actual music making and music listening in specific cultural and religious contexts. The theory is adopted for this study because the indigenous Bapedi music philosophy and approach concur with Elliott's philosophy. Both emphasize the action of making music, rather than the artefact of a musical event in the form of a musical score. Consistent with these observations, Nzewi (2002:20) asserts that "Africa perfected paraxial music education" since Africans have always been actively involved in music making instead of "non-participatory auditory encounters with music". Furthermore, Nzewi elaborates that Praxialism allows for the integration of multi-dimensional aspects of music which is a predominant feature in the music making process of this study. According to him, the multi-dimensional aspects include among others, creative thinking, social tolerance, performance techniques, and self-discovery. The following section will explore a review of previous related studies.

### **Previous Related Studies**

Traditional Bapedi music education practice is an integral part of the Bapedi culture and history, and largely an informal process, but informality does not necessarily imply lack of philosophy and systematic procedure in transmitting the knowledge of a music tradition of Bapedi people. A growing body of literature (Omolewa 2007; Nzewi 1999; Nompula 2011; Ramadani 2017; Mapaya 2011; Ngara 2007; Mbaegbu 2015; Joseph & Hartwig 2015; Ogunrinade 2012 and Amlor 2016) that supports this view indicates that traditional African education is an integral part of the culture and history of a local community and is passed from one generation to another by learning through various modes, which include language, music, dance, oral tradition, proverbs, myths, stories, culture, religion and elders. Omolewa (2007:598) reveals that music and dance are fundamental to the African ways of life. Ramadani (2017:249) and Mbaegbu (2015:180) emphasize the importance and usefulness of the role of music plays in everyday life. Ramadani (2017:248) cites an example of musical education as one of the main factors of cultural development and preservation of national identity.

Mapaya (2011) explored and commented extensively on the indigenous Northern Sotho music learning process. It is beyond the parameters of this study to discuss these issues in any great depth but it is considered important here to mention that Mapaya (2011:72) referred to different modes such as immersion, seclusion, imitation and intuition, drilling and coercion as the most effective modes for the transmission of indigenous African music. He recognized that as with immersion, seclusion plays an important role in focusing the initiates' attention on the training without the disturbances of everyday life (Mapaya 2011:73). In a similar vein, Nzewi (1991:53-55) points out that formal music education is found in African cultures in the form of apprenticeship systems, initiation schools, and music borrowing practices. Nzewi (1999:73) argues that music thinking, education and practice in African traditional cultures have conceptual bases, and are methodical processes. He proceeds to describe how at birth, cultural music: sensitization begins when the baby is carried and jogged to the regular pulse of music many times in a family day (Nzewi 1999:75). According to him:

A young baby carrier participates in children's music and dance activities, which basically feature stepping to the coordinating pulse, while carrying the baby. The mother or any other helper also straps the baby to the body while performing daily chores that require patterned rhythmic regularity, such as sweeping pounding, etc. Thus, the child starts being enculturated into the society's cultural rhythm as well as musical sensitization as a passive participant.

According to scholars writing from an Afrocentric perspective, in the context of Ubuntu, mutuality between the participants, a feeling of tolerance, hospitality and respect for others, their language, opinions, and conversational style is highly regarded (Mkabela 2005; Oyebade 1990; Chawane 2016; Sakuba 2008). In particular, Oyebade (1990:237) observes that Afrocentricity insists that investigation of African phenomena, be it language, history, or gender studies, must be subjected to proper research. Chawane (2016:82) echoes the very same concern when he states that "Afrocentricity is viewed as a theory just for the African diaspora". Mkabela (2005:179) concurs with Chawane (2016:82) when he writes that "the Afrocentric method suggests cultural and social immersion as opposed to scientific distance as the best approach to understand African phenomena".

Various ethnomusicologists like Adeogun (2006), Bohlman (1988), Lebaka (2017), Phibion (2012), Teffera (2006) and Mataruse (2017) have thus eloquently demonstrated that "music is itself one of the most effective mnemonic devices in oral tradition". It has also been argued by Bohlman (1988:15) that the oral transmission of folk music depends on memory and the mnemonic devices that facilitate it. Lebaka (2017:94) also indicates that "the teaching and learning process of indigenous Bapedi music reflects communal composing whereby groups of music practitioners belonging to a particular traditional dance group meet to assemble communally new compositions for specified occasions". In his view, learning music is part of the socialization process and imitation forms an important part in the transmission process (Lebaka 2017:94). To support these observations, Phibion (2012:2) postulates that in African societies, participation in music may be a voluntary activity or an obligation imposed by one's membership in a social group. Furthermore, he observes that compositions and performance techniques are learned by rote and imitation (Phibion 2012:4). According to him, music notation is far less important in nonwestern than in western culture. Consistent with these observations, Mataruse (2017:62) writes that "indigenous African music has relied entirely on an oral tradition of transmitting musical knowledge. He concurs with Phibion by stating that "African music is a cultural activity which reveals a group of people organizing and involving themselves with their own communal relationships" (Mataruse 2017:62). A brief history of the role of traditional music among East African societies by Teffera (2006:36) affirms that among traditional East African communities, music making is closely related with and recognized as a social activity that fosters and reinforces communal unity.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This research study is a product of a negotiated partnership which allowed some of the Bapedi people to define for themselves the degree to which they wish to make themselves available as subjects. A voluntary participation approach was adopted for this study (Bless, Smith & Kagee 2006:102). Participants were at liberty to participate or not to participate, and their decision was guaranteed to be respected. The collection of data for this study was carried out in four villages in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province in South Africa. These villages are predominantly Sepedi-speaking. The four research villages are Dikgageng, Dingwane, Kotsiri and Mashite. Eleven informants were assigned to answer oral questions on stipulated dates and specified times by the researcher. Most of the informants were gradually becoming advanced in years. The interviews and songs were audio recorded and practical performances were photographed.

Myers (1992:22) supports this by stating that during fieldwork the ethnomusicologist assembles primary resources: observations in field notes, recordings of music and interviews, photographs, film and video materials. Myers (1992:22) reckons that field work is a hallmark of many social sciences, including anthropology and ethnomusicology. An extensive literature searches were also undertaken in the libraries of the University of South Africa (UNISA), and University of Pretoria, Pretoria in South Africa to review the existing literature around the topic from journal articles, books and theses to gather and compare secondary data to data obtained from ethnographic fieldwork, while discussion and analysis of results were in progress.

Based on the primary aim of this study, the central question was 'What are the modes of transmission for indigenous Bapedi music during the teaching and learning process?' This led to the following sub-questions, which guided the study:

How is collective identity formed through music?

How does indigenous Bapedi music serve as the core part of Bapedi culture?

How does music affect the transmission and communication process?

The next section addresses the question: What are the modes of transmission for indigenous Bapedi music during the teaching and learning process?

## Results

### **Analysis of the modes of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music using methods and techniques predicated on traditional music education practice.**

The results of observing the modes of teaching and learning of indigenous Bapedi music using methods and techniques predicated on traditional music education practice, as well as the influence of indigenous music on participants is described below. The findings of this study are viewed from four perspectives/themes. The first looks at the **'Creative Process'** (creativity, participation, composing, communal undertaking, listening, story telling and innovation); The second describes the **'Associative Process'** (imitation, collaboration, internalization, repetition, coordination, demonstration and observation); The third reflects on the **'Mastery'** (creative product, aural recall, group performance, creative imagination and communication); and the fourth provides an insight about **'Interaction of musical and choreographic form'** (retention of musical ideas, gestures and actions, improvisation, recreation and variation).

#### **Creative Process**

From the observations and interviews, it was established that in the Bapedi culture, the art of composing requires a reliable musical memory, and the repertoire is heavily indigenous (Lebaka 2017:200). During field research, it was also observed that composing was not necessarily an individual process. All participants were committed to 'creative activities' which involved the relationship between music and dance. Informal interviews indicated that the learning process is a group activity. It is both a pleasure and a recreation rather than a chore. During a personal interview with Madikedike Simon Sete (24 September 2018) at Dikgageng village, Sekhukhune district in Limpopo Province, he pointed out that "the transmission process is organized, direct and instructional". He further mentioned that Bapedi people acquire musical-artistic skill by participating appropriately in shaping contexts in which processes of music making occur and music knowledge is generated.

From the interviews, it was established that musicianship is maintained through practicing, and this is a form of continuing learning which allows Bapedi people to follow the perfection of their skills. In consonance with the above findings, Mataruse (2017:67-68) asserts that through the use of local traditional songs, music education can bring about a democratic society with individuals who have many skills among them, the skills to deal with conflict management in a peaceful manner. Using videos, it was also established that for the transmission process to be meaningful, it is necessary for the participants to be creative and understand socially the various idioms of creativity and conventions of musical presentation. The impression one gets from the interviews and informal discussions about the creative process is that creative imagination and innovation play a vital role in communal composing. The study has also revealed that the transmission process is oral memory based, and as a form of oral communication, both stories and songs play a significant role in Bapedi culture. Consistent with this finding, Joseph and Hartwig (2015:2) observe that music engagement in educational settings is a powerful medium to understand, appreciate and embrace cultures and people. An interesting observation on communal learning should be mentioned. It appears that various techniques are used during the transmission process, for example, observation approach, conscious imitation, etc. In what follows, is the associative process of the teaching and learning process of indigenous Bapedi music.

#### **Associative Process**

During my interaction with different traditional music ensembles in the Bapedi society, I have personally observed that traditional Bapedi musicians, on their own, drawing upon their creative intelligence, use improvisation, re-creation, variation, and gestures to demonstrate dancing rhythmic patterns, while other participants are observing and to make their performances and/or renditions impressive. Using videos, it was recorded that music performance acts always include demonstration and observation (**see photo 1**). Based on my experience in the Bapedi culture, the spectrum of learning experiences can range from accidental, unintentional, or reluctant forms of learning to active, intentional, involved and highly valued forms of learning.



**Photo 1**

Cultural festival (Dikgageng village; Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province, 24.09.2018), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

The literature that has been reviewed demonstrates that in the Bapedi society, imitation forms an important part of music learning (see photo 2), and the simplest and most undifferentiated form of music learning occurs through imitation (Lebaka 2017:106). Of particular interest is the fact that participants learn through slow absorption and unconscious internalization of sounds.



**Photo 2**

Cultural festival (Dikgageng village; Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province, 24.09.2018), Photographer: Morakeng Edward Kenneth Lebaka

Informal discussions have revealed that after the participants have mastered the songs, they can start dancing, and the dance is repeated innumerable times until all participants have mastered every detail. From the interviews, it was established that learning dancing involves coordination and collaboration, and different techniques are used to start, vary and stop the performance. During my field investigation in Sekhukhune district, it was further observed that repetition is the established style of performing traditional Bapedi music. Attesting to the observation above, Teffera (2006:42) writes that every music tradition possesses its own rules and concepts that will enable musicians to perform music accordingly. When it was asked whether indigenous Bapedi music serves as the core part of Bapedi culture. All participants felt that indigenous Bapedi songs establish mutual relationships as well as cementing friendships, but also communicate social and ethical

values within Bapedi culture. This question was intentionally posed to the participants in a quest to get their understanding on the relationship between music, culture and identity.

### **Mastery**

An interesting observation on communal music-making should be mentioned. It appears that the creative music-making takes place during a process of interaction between the participants' musical experience and competence, their cultural practice and their instructions. Altogether, this forms the *affordances* in the creative situation. Results of the study showed that with musical creativity and rhythmic direction, participants build a repertoire which is characterized by cultural blend, polyrhythm, improvisation and interlocking rhythms which compel the participants to dance to the music. These observations are vividly corroborated by Ogunrinade (2012:114) who states that "traditional music knowledge system has capability for promoting music education, especially as it relates to the ways, culture and values of where it evolves".

The above evidence leads to the assumption that the formation of musical organizations encourages creativity and innovation. Nompula (2011:371) endorses this observation by stating that the creativity that is involved in improvisation is evidence that an African child is capable of composing. Comments by Nompula are noteworthy because during a personal interview with Madikedike Simon Sete (28<sup>th</sup> of September 2018) at Dingwane village, Sekhukhune district, he pointed out that musical creativity involves knowing why, when and how to shape the on-going music performance in ways that are contextually, situationally, artistically, socially and personally significant. These observations are supported by Nzewi (1999:79) who observes that traditional African wisdom and orientation to human up-bringing, advocate that knowing through practical participation and experiencing is a key educational methodology, crucial to the early education of an original-thinking individual.

### **Interaction of Musical and Choreographic form**

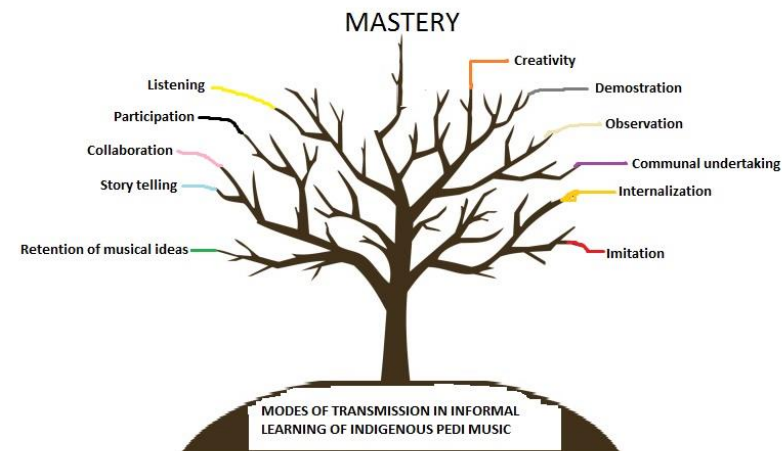
Informal interviews indicated that traditionally when Bapedi people have rehearsals or performances, they sing and dance together. During the field research in the Bapedi community, I have observed that by using their ears to execute different rhythmic patterns, participants can memorize long cycles of patterns with signals, breaks, responses, etc. Based on research findings, it is evident that creative music-making involves retention of musical ideas, gestures and actions. The results have also shown that musical creativity revolves around improvisation, recreation and variation. From the above discussion, it would seem that communal music-making in the Bapedi culture is a quest for unity and integration.

Attesting to the observations above, Adeogun (2006:3-55) observes that "in Africa, actualizing music has both its communalistic and individualistic aspects". Further, Adeogun (2006:3-55) elaborates that "communalistic in the sense that the musical creation of an individual rarely belongs to him, but to the group he belongs. The above information correlates with the observation of Lebaka (2017:72), namely, that amongst Bapedi people, music is a binding force and a way of consolidating collective will. According to Makokobetše Isaac Magane (personal communication, 28 September 2018), the viewpoints of Adeogun and Lebaka are correct. According to him "songs and music are strongly linked to cultural and religious activities". Phibion (2012:2) endorses this observation by stating that traditional music performances bring individuals together and affirm communally held morals and values. Indications from the investigation suggest that intellectual understanding of music involves concept formation, understanding of musical language and engaging music thoughtfully through listening. On the basis of these findings and discussions, it is arguable that indigenous Bapedi music and oral tradition communicate within and contribute to the formation of both culture and community. Similar to my argument, Omolewa (2007:595) observes that traditional African education is always used as the information base for the community, which facilitates communication and decision-making. He further elaborates that traditional African education uses the age grade system in which those about the same age are brought together to share responsibilities, work together and to be introduced to activities that will not be burdensome for their grade (Omolewa 2007:596). When participants were asked about how music is used by individuals and different traditional dance groups to construct identity and self-perception, all interviewees were in agreement that "music in general, must be understood as a critical response to shifts of identity and plays a significant role in expressing personal and communal views on how life affects the Bapedi society". What will follow in the next section is the discussion of results.

### **Discussion**

The results yielded thus far have shown that traditional Bapedi music education practice is an integral part of the Bapedi culture and history, which is transmitted through various modes. Such an indigenous system of holistic education involves

listening (singing & instrumental playing, aural recall, repetition); participation (listening, imitation, repetition); collaboration (improvisation, coordination, gestures); story telling (listening, oral communication, internalization); retention of musical ideas (aural recall, memorization, intent concentration); demonstration (observation, call-and-response, imitation, repetition); observation (instruction, demonstration, imitation); communal undertaking (participation, repertoire, repetition); imitation (recall and repetition), internalization (memorisation, holistic understanding and juxtaposition), creativity (soloing, leading and originality) and mastery (participants are able to use music meaningfully in different domains to further understand the tradition and the way in which it reacts within its social frameworks), methods which are an inherent and integral aspect of the socialization or enculturation process that takes place in the primary contexts of the musics (**see figure 1**).



**Figure 1: Modes of transmission in informal teaching and learning of Indigenous Bapedi music.**

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that traditional Bapedi music education, which is passed from generation to another, is usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has to some extent been the basis for sustainable development in Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Indications from the investigation revealed that this mode of education has by and large been used as a way of acquiring lifelong learning. Informal discussions and interviews have demonstrated that traditional Bapedi music education is based on practical common sense, on teachings and experience and it is holistic.

The exposition of this study has shown that music and dance are fundamental to the Bapedi people ways of life, and culture is everything that characterises Bapedi society. The impression created during interviews and observations was that indigenous Bapedi music education practice plays a vital role in the preservation of Bapedi cultural heritage and identity.

Findings from this study further indicate that music is part of the indigenous Bapedi education process, through which its objective is to develop the abilities and skills of Bapedi people. Reviewing the results yielded thus far, it is clear that Bapedi people learn a great deal from one another whenever and wherever they interact. Attesting to the observations above, Nzewi (2005:vii) asserts that in indigenous African societies every person has a chance to experience the social, moral, health and entertainment values of music and dance on a daily basis. According to him, these values become richer if a person takes part as an active performer. He further maintains that proverbs, folktales, wise sayings and oral discussions are methods of intellectual explanation and reflect indigenous theory. Comments by Nzewi are noteworthy because during my field investigation it was found that Bapedi people regard singing as essentially a group activity, an opportunity to express their communal ethos. Similar to what obtains in Nzewi, Kaemmer (1993:156) highlights that "music often results in communication, even when people are not aware that it is taking place". Kaemmer (1993:156) however, has cogently argued that sometimes communicating through music is a way of publicly disseminating information. In view of the comments and observations made by Nzewi and Kaemmer in this study, it is evident that through enhancing communication, music is a way of building and maintaining group identity.

## Conclusion

The results of this study provide evidence that music teaching and learning in Bapedi society is an integral part of cultural and religious life, and is rich in historical and philosophical issues. The data analysis has so far revealed that in Bapedi culture, learning music through participation has been a constant practice. The research unveiled that the transmission process involves participation, fostering of communal sense, concentration on the present moment and the use of musico-cultural formulae and cues for interactional purposes. This research also uncovered that indigenous Bapedi music is mastered, appreciated, felt and understood through sustained exposure to the socio-creative interactions of practical experiencing and the repertoire is heavily indigenous.

It is concluded that in Bapedi society, creative music-making and music identity are the obverse sides of the same coin, in that the former provides an arena in which the latter can be explored. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that a research study of this kind should be taken seriously for an exploration of indigenous values influencing the teaching and learning systems. This would assist in preserving Bapedi cultural heritage and identity. Targeting teacher educators would be an important part in an effort to include indigenous knowledge and ways of thinking in the curriculum of both lower and higher education.

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