

POPULAR MUSIC PREFERENCES AMONG MUSIC STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN VIHIGA COUNTY KENYA

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the music preferences of the music students in the secondary schools in Vihiga County. Studies have revealed that 90% of youth in Kenya are inclined towards Popular music and do demonstrate distaste towards traditional music and classical music expressions. In what appears to be a contradiction, the Kenya Secondary Music Curriculum has scanty popular music content compared to Western music which enjoys over 60% worth of content. It is in view of this contradiction that this study sought to establish music preferences among music students in secondary schools that offer music in Vihiga County. The study addressed the following specific objectives: establish musical expressions and programmes experienced in the selected schools in Vihiga County; establish popular music preferences among the music students in Vihiga Country; discuss content gaps in the secondary music curriculum. The results revealed that all the school activities (symposiums, cultural days, entertainment, sports, and others) that took place outside class were all accompanied by popular music. Over 95% of respondents affirmed the need to include popular music content in the Kenya Secondary Music Curriculum. In addition, it was evident that students expressed fair amount of interest in contemporary popular music with a majority indicating guitar, keyboards, modern drum sets, and percussion instruments as instruments they would like to learn how to play. The study concluded that there is an urgent need to include popular music in Kenya Secondary School Curriculum as one of the ways to address students' musical preferences and equip them with skills that are market.

Key words: *Popular music, Music curriculum, Inclusion, Secondary school*

I. INTRODUCTION

Secondary school education in Kenya is a significant stage in the life of the young. It is within this period of life that understudies' interests are probably going to be created. These interests are probably going to energize and inspire are likely to excite and motivate learners to acquire knowledge and skills, map out their career paths, and discover more about their social life. Within the secondary school educational program, music is one of the subjects that assume a significant role in reifying these interests. By engaging in various musical activities, understudies may acquire creation, listening, and performance skills, which can expose them to various forums for social interactions as well as opening up their career pathways.

Music genres studied in the Kenyan 8-4-4 system in secondary school music curriculum fall under African folk music and western classical traditions. However, popular music, a genre that the students are more exposed to and interact with on a day to day basis (Law & Ho, 2015), is excluded in the music curriculum (Thompson, 2007; Otoy, 2010). This exclusion diminished and lowered the interest in music and explained the dwindling number of music students pursuing music in secondary schools as well as those transitioning to institutions of higher learning (Kenya National Examination Commission [KNEC], 2017).

Green (2006) vividly pointed out, "students often see school music as 'old people's music' and popular music as their own. Students are acculturated into popular music by the acquisition of musical knowledge and skills through their immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of (their) social context (Green 2002, p. 22) in an informal music education environment" (p. 101).

According to Snell (2005) the music students who join the music industry after school, confess that the music they learnt was inadequate to make them unbeatable popular musicians. Students who enrolled for instrumental classes also ended up losing interest faster (Green, 2000).

Because of the rigid curriculum and the unending rules in teaching music, students have opted out of music classes. The teachers on the other hand have also been insensitive to music of young people and have gone ahead to follow the syllabus strictly without wavering (Green, 2008).

II. METHODOLOGY

The study targeted a populace that incorporated all music educators and all form three music students from secondary schools offering music as a subject in Vihiga County, Kenya. Purposive sampling was utilized to choose nine music educators and 112 form three music understudies from nine schools offering music in the County. The form three class was chosen in light of two reasons: First, it is a dynamic class where the understudies settle on a decision to either proceed or drop music as a subject of study in Kenya. Furthermore, out of close to home understanding, the form three music understudies have done music throughout the previous two years and are attempted to be in a situation to think logically and settle on choices about their instructive way, which will assist them with understanding their future objectives. All the nine music educators and the 112 form three music understudies reacted to the questionnaires given. The results were as follows:

III. RESULTS

Musical expressions and programs

In the Kenyan secondary schools, there are a number of activities that students engage in outside the classroom. Some of the activities entail, symposiums, Kenya Music Festivals, Annual General Meetings, cultural days, religious meetings and entertainment sessions.

In any of these activities, the kind of musical genres the students engage in outside the classroom, were mentioned as zilizopendwa, gospel pop, bongo, hip-hop, dance hall, rumba, folk song, Rhythmand Blues. Other genres mentioned were; jazz, rock music, western music, riddims, taarab, instrumental music, Afro pop, Lingala, Trap, Nyashinski songs, soft rock music, 254 music and listen to popular music. Very few students responded that they listen to African and western classical music.

The music teachers on the other hand responded in harmony with the students on the question of listing the music genres that students perform during activities outside classroom as follows:

Table 4.12 Music teachers response on the music genres performed outside classroom

S/N	TEACHER	GENDER	RESPONSE
1	TRKPT	Female	<i>African music and contemporary music such as Bongo</i>
2	TRBNR	Female	<i>They perform folk songs, zilizopendwa, hymns and Bongo</i>
3	TRVOK	Male	<i>Modern ones such as hip hop, Bongo</i>
4	TRIGN	Male	<i>Hip hop, reggae, kapuka, bongo, R n B, Gospel pop</i>
5	TRVHG	Male	<i>Reggae, Hip hop and bongo</i>
6	TRIKB	Male	<i>Bongo, R n B, rhumba, kapuka, genge, funk and reggae</i>
7	TRKVY	Female	<i>Western set pieces and own compositions</i>
8	TRNGR	Male	<i>Pop music i.e rhumba, hip hop, gospel pop and African folk songs</i>

The teachers' views supported the students' voices that the music mostly listened to during activities outside classroom are popular music such as *genge, zilizopendwa, kapuka, funk, bongo, reggae, hip-hop and R n B*. That popular music can be used to draw the attention of students to an activity that is interesting.

Popular music preferences among music students in Vihiga County

What to improve in the secondary school music curriculum

Music teachers responses and Form Three music students responses reveal that inclusion of popular music in the curriculum is preferred by most students. The music teachers responded about introduction of contemporary music, allowing students to perform popular music, inclusion of zilizopendwa and addition of pop music for example bongo, rhumba et cetera. The music students responded by mentioning specific music genres of their preference such as kapuka, hip-hop, reggae, bongo, rhythm and blues et cetera.

The students mentioned guitar as an instrument that should be used in music classes much more often, and that students be allowed to play it. It is true that, musical instruments play a major role in popular music performances. They enrich a performance by adding harmonies when several instruments are combined together. They also provide the beat, which helps not only in identifying a style or genre, but also to motivate a

listener to dance to the music. Western musical instruments can be classified as either string (violin, guitar, cello, viola, double bass, among others), percussive (drums, cymbals, shakers, etc.), wind which include both woodwind and brass (saxophone, trumpet, flute, trombone, clarinet, bassoon, etc.) or electronic keyboards and pianos.

On the other hand, African music instruments are classified either as chordophones such as Nyatiti, Ong'eng'o, Ishiriri; Aerophones for instance mulele, nzumari, oporo; Membranophones for example bul, muriempe, boula, mabumbumbu; or idiophones e.g. guards, bells, shakers depending on the community that one comes from. It is important to note that in Kenya today, some artists of popular music combine both Western and African musical instruments in making and producing their music.

The students' interest in guitar as one of their preferred musical instruments raised interest about why they preferred the instrument. Roby (2012) has observed that guitar is the most popular instrument around the world as it is used in almost all popular music genres. The interesting sound of country, blues, rock and roll, reggae, and hip-hop music could not be interesting without the guitar. Kenya's popular music is diverse with different cultures making up the population. The diversity of the population gives the music a unique and fun taste.

Guitar having spread to the rest of the world had its way into the country and today, most Kenyan popular songs have guitar as the main instrument in the various genres. To mention just a few; *Kenge Kengeis* an Afro pop band that plays a mixture of traditional Luo eight cowhide drums, a traditional Luo horn (*oporo*), a fiddle (*orutu*), a lyre (*nyatiti*) and modern electronic lead guitar, bass guitar, kettle drums and percussive instruments.

Erick Wainaina, a Kenyan popular musician, has his music largely in Afro pop style. His song titled *Duniaina Mambo* has a combination of the following instruments: acoustic guitar, electric guitar, trumpet, traditional drums and other percussive instruments. Another popular music band that has its roots from Congo known as *Samba Mapangala*, has been one of the entertainers in the Kenyan Music industry for over three decades since the 1970s. One of their albums, *Song and Dance*, which was released in 2006 has a mixture of African rhythms and Afro-Cuban music that used the following instruments: saxophone, kettledrums, bass guitar, lead guitar, rhythm guitar and piano.

The last example is drawn from D.O. Misiani the *grandfather of Bengas* he's popularly known by his fans. In his song *WuoroManono*, he used the international Cuban influence in playing his guitar. The other accompanying instruments in his song are *nyatiti* (African lyre), rhythm guitar, solo guitar and lead guitar in his song that sought to teach the history of the Luo people of East Africa. The above mentioned are just a few of the Kenyan popular music artists who have used guitar to accompany their compositions. Being that most popular musics are accompanied by guitar, the love for learning to play guitar may have cropped up among the students who may wish to train to play their favorite popular songs on the guitar.

For Law & Ho (2015), popular music is a genre that the youth are exposed to more and interact with on a day-to-day basis. They are exposed to a variety of music through gadgets such as iPads, iPhones, televisions, radios, and internet channels such as YouTube. It is through these gadgets that the youth can access popular music with much ease. The young people use their ear phones to listen to music that has been shared through Facebook, twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube. These web cultures have dominated the everyday lives of the adolescents making popular music become easier to engage with because of the advance 4G networks which help in faster downloads of popular music using peer-to-peer sharing on the internet and free music video listening from YouTube.

The ability to be able to share music with others has made the adolescents express their music preferences by dancing to the current music style. The young people on the other hand would mimic their peers in order to identify with the friend in a shared action.

In Kenyan schools today, popular music is played during sports days, cultural days, debates and symposiums as an interlude between one activity and the other. During these activities, some schools may allow students to listen and dance to popular music of their choice. Outside school, popular music can be heard in public vehicles, motor bikes or during birthday parties. When the young people visit the church, they are also met with gospel pop tunes that delight their souls. At home, the same students listen to the music from the television, radios, cell phones and even laptops. The distinct sounds of guitar may have thronged the ears of the adolescents making them love to learn how to play this instrument during their free time.

Continuous exposure to music with specific dominating instrument tends to have an influence to implant in our minds certain musical characteristics but also appears to have a positive long-lasting effect that may be read as agency and a desire to influence policy. In other words, when the youth (un)consciously watch popular music videos, listen and dance to popular music repetitively, there is a tendency of the music remaining in their minds. This can trigger emotions and strong experiences which can be used to agitate for positive changes such as inclusion of guitar as one of the music instruments to be taught in the music curriculum. Indeed, "guitar lessons [should] be introduced in schools ..." is a statement attributed to one of the student's during the research

suggesting that playing instruments not only is important in the students' school musical life, but also points to importance of popular music in general.

Whereas discussions above revolve around Western related musical instruments, respondents also noted the need for African instrumental pedagogy stating that there is a '*need to be taught how to play traditional instruments*'. In the same vein as noted earlier, the need for African instrumental pedagogy emanates from the fact that popular music genres in Kenya, which appeals to the masses and is easily accessible, has now taken a hybrid form with both indigenous and foreign musical elements (Monte & Mochere 2019).

A Kenyan popular style such as *ohangla* uses both indigenous and Western instruments in their performances. One of the famous *ohangla* artists known as '*Mtotowashule*' has produced songs such as *Nyiri lore*, *Princess Jano*, *TotiAluongi*. In his songs, he has used eight cowhide drums, shoulder-slung monitor lizard-skin drum, a flute, guitars, keyboard and other electric musical accompaniments. As with the case of popular music accompanied by the Guitar, indigenous popular music with African instruments is equally popular among the youth (Inglis, 2006). Therefore, repetitious listening to this kind of music, which includes a catchy beat that is attractive to the learners, may have influenced learners' attachment to and taste on African traditional instruments.

Kingsley (1957) asserts that, "what one enjoys is determined in a large measure by training and experience. The attitude of appreciation and enjoyment is like other attitudes, developed through learning. The school can and should enrich the lives of its pupils by the cultivation of attitudes that predispose them toward appreciative response" (p. 426). The training and experience that students get, may lead to musical preference, positive attitude and musical taste. The training causes familiarity of music to set in which makes one develop the above three attributes. When listening to music repeatedly, it leads to one having a favorable response to music that is unfamiliar. Since the youth are exposed to variety of popular music genres, they already have a preference based on being familiar with the song, and this favored musical taste creates a positive attitude on learning to play an instrument.

Children can be in contact with certain type of music and instrumental learning that relates to a type of music genre (Finnas, 1989). This can later shape the student's music preference as he or she grows up. When analyzing music preference, Bonneville-Roussy et al (2013, p. 705), commented, "Individuals use music to satisfy and reinforce basic psychological and physical needs". Which means people may use music to attain certain specific goals such as learning an instrument. One can learn to play his or her favorite music genre on an instrument of choice. Those who have had positive experience when listening to music will know the type of music to listen to attain a specific goal. These thoughts could have been in the subconscious mind of the students who mentioned that popular music could help them learn to play African instruments.

An analysis of the Kenyan secondary schools music content reveals that apart from its Eurocentric nature, there are missing links pedagogically and the teaching incorporated is theoretical in nature (Akuno, 2012; Wambugu, 2012; Mochere, 2014; Chokera, 2016). A small percentage of African music has been included in the secondary school music curriculum and to a large extent relevant contemporary music seems to be ignored.

In addition, when it comes to instrumental pedagogy, the approach is skewed towards theory than actual practical learning and performance. Indeed, data and analysis in this study points to a possible disconnect between instrumental pedagogy and the music preferred by the youth. Nevertheless, inclusion of popular music in the Kenyan secondary school music curriculum as an additional component carries the possibility of enhancing instrumental pedagogy in Kenyan educational institutions. It also stands to enrich the existing 8-4-4 music curriculum.

Content gap in the Secondary School music curriculum

In the secondary school music curriculum, western music content is divided into basic skills, history and practical. The African section entails history, analysis and practical section whereas the popular music column is general.

In Form One approved music course book, Foundation Music Book One, the western content studied in the first term which runs for twelve weeks has introduction to elements of music, note symbols and history of music of the medieval (to 1450) period. In the African section under the categories of different music, popular music is defined, and its genres are mentioned. In second term, transposition of melodies within the same clef and introduction of diatonic scales under western music, are included. In African section, the students learn about occasions of music performances in the African society. In term three under western music, the students are expected to be in a position to write a four bar melody. Also included is history of music of the Renaissance (1450-1600) period.

In Form Two, the study established that students are to study writing of a melody to eight bars, learning the minor diatonic scales and history of Baroque (1600-1750) music in western music. In African music, they study classification of African instruments in term one. In term two, the students are then expected to learn

transposition of melodies from one key to another as well as factors affecting African music. In term three, all the western and African music content done in form one and two are reviewed. It is during term three that many teachers begin to expose the students to western music pieces performed by voice or recorder (in Vihiga County) which then covers part of the practical paper.

In form three term one, students learn about the history of classical (1750-1850) music and should be in a position to write a melody of twelve bars and harmonize a melody to four voices. African dances from a section of Kenyan communities in Kenya, are also learnt. In term two, the students explore the history of romantic (1850-1900) music with more content on the role of costumes, décor, soloists and music instruments in the African section. In term three the students' experience is expected to allow them to write a melody of sixteen bars and should be in a position to know the characteristics, forms, composers and works of the musicians who lived in the music periods learnt from medieval to romantic period. At the end of term three, the students should be able to analyze African and western pieces.

At Form Four first term, the music content remaining includes the 20th century music, modulation to the dominant, sub dominant and relative minor, additional content of African music, which entails the relationship between music and dance, music and language among others. It is required that at form four the student should be conversant with all the music content learnt from form one to four. Since there is little music content at form four, more emphasis is put on learning the African folk dances and songs, western pieces, technical exercises and sight-reading which constitute the practical examination. As practical music is examined at KCSE, students and teachers tend to put more emphasis on the same. However, this could contribute to students not being able to perfect their practical competence because of much theory work done in the first three years of their secondary education.

It is evident from the preceding discussions and the analysis of the secondary school music curriculum that, popular music has only been scantily mentioned under categories of music in form one, without an opportunity being granted to the students to perform the music.

IV. CONCLUSION

Music teachers and the form three music students showed high preferences for popular music genres. The current that this popular music preference reinforces the conclusion that popular music teaching and learning should constitute a large component of music curriculum in secondary schools. This conclusion was strengthened by revelation of the findings that most of the outside class activities were accompanied by popular music. It was evident from the analysis of the secondary school music curriculum that, since popular music is just mentioned with no performance attached to it; it therefore suffices to conclude that lack of inclusion of popular music in curriculum has made the curriculum unpopular among students. It was evidently clear from the findings that popular music genres are the main musical experiences students in secondary schools interact with more often, and therefore this can only necessitate the inclusion of popular music in the Kenya secondary school music curriculum.

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