

## LEARNERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS PRACTICAL MUSICIANSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUNGOMA COUNTY

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### ABSTRACT

*Researchers across the globe have found huge support for music as a necessary component of an adolescent's life. Since music seems to be such an important part of young people's identity and it influences many aspects of their behaviour, the topic of formal music education remains critical and open to exploration and discussion. The discrepancy between 'music at school' and 'music out of school' is therefore often huge for students. The aim of this paper is to investigate the attitudes of learners in secondary schools towards practical musicianship. Adopting the use of descriptive survey design, the study targeted 19 teachers and 177 students of music from 15 purposively sampled secondary schools. Data was collected using personal interviews, observation schedule, document analysis and a questionnaire. The collected data was then analyzed descriptively based on emerging themes and quotas. The study established that majority of the students of music had a positive attitude towards practical musicianship. As a result, teachers are only required to encourage and motivate them towards attaining their desired career goals in musicianship. However, some students had also developed negative attitude about school music because of lack of instrumental and vocal provisions. The study recommends inclusion of music technology and popular music within the music curriculum to stimulate wider interest in the subject. More so, provision of opportunities for students to talk about their musical interests, likes and dislikes on a regular basis in order to better facilitate meaningful musical instruction should be encouraged.*

**Keywords:** Musicianship, Interest, Knowledge, Motivation, Learners' attitudes, Secondary schools

### INTRODUCTION

Practical musicianship occurs when a musician is able to produce music which they perceive internally and, in their imagination, either through instrumental playing, singing, and reading from notation or through improvisation (ABRSM, 2012). Active involvement in music and its passionate consumption is a typical characteristic of adolescents (Campbell, Connell & Beegle, 2007). Music has an important meaning among many adolescents' lives and some of them see it

as vital part of their identity, either as music performers (by playing it, composing it, writing lyrics and dancing to it among other activities) or as passionate listeners and collectors of music pieces.

Campbell et al. (2007) identified five principal themes within the expressed meanings of music by adolescents to include; identity formation in and through music, emotional benefits, music's life benefits, including character-building and life skills, social benefits and positive and negative impressions of school music programs and their teachers. Involvement in music listening and activity can take place easily in informal as well as formal contexts, and the relationship between music in and out of school can be rather complex (Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall & Tarrant, 2003).

School is the right place where students have a chance to get to know valuable works of art and by doing so, they have a chance to approach art closely (Vidulin-Orbanić & Duraković, 2012). Musical performance enhances skill acquisition, perfection and co-ordination, thus development of confidence in learners. Musical art and culture therefore have a common goal which entails to educate and create critical listeners and music connoisseurs gaining insight into the basic components of music. (Atanasov, & Margetić, 2011).

The Croatian National Curriculum Framework signifies music as an art pointing out the "role music plays in formation of personal and social-cultural beliefs and worldviews (National Curriculum Framework, 2010, p. 153). This study therefore explores learners' attitudes towards social and practical musicianship. According to Hallam (2010), active involvement with music has effects on the intellectual, social and personal developmental of children, and young people which contribute to enhancement of practical musicianship through performance. Musical skills

may therefore transfer to other activities such as leadership, creativity and organisation skills if the processes involved are similar. However positive effects of engagement with music on personal and social development only occur if it is an enjoyable and rewarding experience (Hallam, 2010).

A highly legitimate motive stated for the use of informal teaching strategies is to increase students' engagement with and motivation for music education in school (Green, 2002, 2008; Folkestad, 2006). The image of Swedish students' motivation that has emerged through the national evaluation and previous research is partly contradictory. Students enjoy the music subject and appreciate being able to play music in groups (Skolverket, 2004b). Music curricula have increasingly become characterized by current music culture and – at least parts of – popular music are being integrated into the subject (see Karlsson & Karlsson, 2009). Despite this, it appears that students experience the subject as old-fashioned and that it lacks breadth of genres (Skolverket, 2004a). Western instructional methods which stress more on playing of western instruments and reading music notations still take centre stage in music education in Kenya. However, Wanjala, (2003) states that graduates who have undergone music classes in primary school, secondary schools and even universities often find themselves well-endowed with theoretical knowledge and little knowledge in practical musicianship.

Using appropriate complimentary teaching strategies, resources and repertoire across music classrooms, studios and ensembles helps in the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and artistic ability to perform music in different learning contexts. There is strong evidence that deep learning is enhanced when educators use 'multiple representations' by offering several mutually supportive sources or experiences for learning" (Nuthall, 1999).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The review of underpinning literature recognizes the power of music to bring enjoyment, pleasure, beauty, happiness and satisfaction to people's lives (Sloboda, 2012). Hughes (2013) describes music within education as 'an exercise in friendship and co-operation where the completed whole is more than the sum of the parts, that represents a goal which few subjects in the curriculum can readily be attained (p. 17). As Bentley (2005) claims, success in music education is largely based on the positive attitudes of learners and failure based on negative attitudes. According to Brocklehurst (2011) success in the teaching of music 'depends on creating favorable dispositions and positive constructive attitudes as well as imparting information and developing skills' (p. 57). Therefore, the creation of positive attitudes towards music is essential, since it determines the quantity and quality of musical teaching and learning; by contrast, the creation of negative attitudes (as with any subject) may result in it becoming perceived as dull, while learners of Music may sense unimportance or aimlessness in musical teaching.

The power of music education can be measured through its contribution towards the development of learners' intelligence as well as in the development of creative thought and action; the exploration of values; and the development of perceptual skills and engagement in practical musicianship (Gulbenkian Report, 2012). The ideal goal of music education in schools is to ensure that learners participate in music making and listening (Kaplan, 2006), as well as to equip them with the ability to make rational choices about music (Peters & Miller, 2012). Music education within a school can be evaluated according to six elements (Jorgensen, 2008), each of which relates to Kaplan's (2006) social and aesthetic parameters: music, teaching, learning,

instruction, curriculum and administration. All of these aspects have the power to influence learners' attitudes towards musicianship.

Brocklehurst (2011) asserts that learners' attitudes towards general musicianship can be influenced by many factors dependent upon the environment in which pupils grow up and the treatments they receive from both home and school. If success in music education is based upon the construction of positive attitudes among pupils (Bentley, 2008) then the evaluation of the factors that influence and affect learners' attitudes is vital. Moreover, if learners' voices can be considered as a valuable source of educational evaluation and agent for school improvement', then knowledge of learners' attitudes and their reasons for holding them may provide useful information for all involved in the educational setting, including teachers of Music, head teachers, and curriculum planners (Sanderson & Savva, 2014). As the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2003) denotes, while the development of attitudes has not always been an explicit focus of teaching in schools, it is increasingly being explicitly identified as a major goal of schooling and should, therefore, also be regarded as a significant outcome of the learning process and future development of learner musicianship skills and engagement.

Development of group performances promotes interest in music. This explains the formation of the Kenya Music Festival (KMF), which is among the national organs that have greatly influenced musicianship in Kenya. It has by far been the most promising forum for developing practical skills in vocal, instrumental and dance music. KMF is an annual event organized under the auspices of Ministry of Education and an excellent auxiliary service to formal Education (Kuria (1997), cited in Wanjala, 2013) whose objective is to promote the study and performance of music and dance and to enhance cultural development and creativity.

KMF is open to pupils, students and teachers in educational institutions including primary and secondary schools, Teachers' colleges (Diploma and Primary Teachers' Colleges), Technical Institutes, Youth Polytechnics, Institutes of Technology and Universities. This wide spectrum of participation undoubtedly justifies KMF as a suitable forum for determining various traits of musicianship as well as levels of excellence among musicians in Kenya. This is because through it, individual and group talents from all over the country are displayed. For many participants, KMF is a tremendously fulfilling experience and a forum for venting one's musical expression in addition to providing a practical context for the music knowledge obtained in class.

### **Learners Attitude towards Music Education for Life & Inclusion**

Contributing to the lives of children and adolescents is important in and of itself and should in no way be dismissed. Music experiences can form the context in which much human development occurs (McPherson, 2006). Yet, it is possible that a traditional school music experience of the highest quality can actually deter engagement later in life. A number of participants in Arasi's (2008) study reflected on their high school choral experiences with such fondness that they seemed to doubt whether similar experiences were even available to adults. They may in fact have built unrealistic expectations if the only reason to pursue community singing opportunities is to make them 'feel the way they felt in their high school choir' (Arasi, 2008, p. 32). As beneficial as school music activities can be, music need not merely be a feature of childhood that people eventually outgrow.

Although relatively few graduates of school-based ensembles ever seek out similar performance outlets in adult life (Myers, 2008; Regelski, 2006), most research considering participatory music involvement among adults has limited itself to these kinds of organized activities. There are societal institutions that essentially duplicate the school music model (North & Hargreaves,

2008). They provide formal music instruction, usually teacher-centred, often focused on preserving certain cultural elements of music, including ‘high art’ traditions. Such institutions include church music groups, community bands, and adult beginning classes (see Coffman, 2002, for a review). Of course, formally organized music activities are but one kind of outlet for adult music-making. One could argue that music education is oriented toward these activities to such an extent that it effectively only prepares the very few graduates who aspire to be university music majors. For those students who do not aspire to this end, music will likely occupy leisure time and informal settings when they become adults.

What they need most are the skills of independent musicianship (Regelski, 2008), so they need not rely on an ensemble director, printed sheet music, and an externally imposed schedule in order to make music. The skills of vernacular musicianship, traditionally ignored by school music programs in the US, would seem useful: playing by ear, improvising, song writing, group collaboration, and basic fluency on more than one instrument (e.g., McGillen & McMillan, 2005; Miell & Littleton, 2008; Woody & Lehmann, 2010). For these reasons, a number of music educators and researchers have advocated the integration of the informal learning practices of vernacular musicians into school-based music education (Green, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004; O’Flynn, 2006). This is no small task, given some of the longstanding traditions of formal music teaching. Pitts (2005) warned against trying to replicate within schools what works so well outside them:

Music teaching in schools needs to be compatible with, but distinctive from, the musical learning in which students are engaged beyond the classroom, so that students are encouraged in their independent learning by teachers who retain a credible and supportive role (p. 128).

Wood winds, especially reeded instruments, seem to be a better choice for students who have hearing problems, because players can feel the vibrations from the reed through their teeth on the

mouthpiece. Feeling the vibrations can mimic hearing and help students become successful on the instrument. Woodwinds, however, are harder for students who lack fine motor control because of the independence and speed needed in the fingers. Percussion is a great choice overall for most children with disabilities because there are so many different percussion instruments than can be played; it is possible to find an instrument for the various needs of every student (Mcdowell, 2010).

Even with the new educational laws protecting students with disabilities in both general and music classrooms, there are still many issues with current inclusion practices. Two of the biggest issues are the fact that teachers may not have been trained or given pre-service experience teaching students with disabilities, especially if they graduated from college more than a decade ago. “Teacher educators often have little or no preparation as to how to educate future music educators regarding the inclusion of music students with disabilities or how to plan, implement, and assess lessons in self-contained and inclusive music classrooms (Hammel & Hourigan, 2011, p. 45).

The understanding of music involves the mastery of its various layers of meaning. Sometimes this meaning can be acquired through human insight; at other times, it can be learned. Keith Swanwick examines this relationship on three levels: in considering music as a way of knowing; as the apparent predicament between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms; and as a tension in education. Keith Swanwick guides his reader from a theoretical exploration of musical knowledge, through an examination of ways of researching the musical experience to a concluding section which will be of direct practical help to teachers. He suggests ways in which music education can be a vital transaction, giving examples across a range of music teaching, including school classroom and instrumental studios (Swanwick, 1979).



## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was carried out in Bungoma County. This study was based on constructivist research paradigm which presents people as constructors of their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Bereiter, 1994). In the classroom, the constructivist view of learning can point towards a number of different teaching practices. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. The teacher makes sure he/she understands the students' pre-existing conceptions, and guides the activity to address them and then build on them (Herrington & Oliver, 2000).

Only a student's own internal motivation can provide the initiative for long-term successful learning (Gruender, 1996). Piaget (1969) posited that the human mind creates schemata structures by which individuals intellectually adapt to and organize the environment. For Piaget, this process takes place via the dual methods of assimilation and accommodation.

The study adopted a descriptive Survey research design using the mixed approach. Therefore, the tools used for data collection were the questionnaire, Focused Group Discussions (FGDs), Interview schedules and observation schedules targeting respondents in secondary schools in Bungoma County, Kenya. With a total of 261 secondary schools, only 15 secondary schools that offer music purposively participated in the study from which 177 Form Four students and 19 teachers of music were drawn (County Education Report, 2014) as depicted in Table 1.

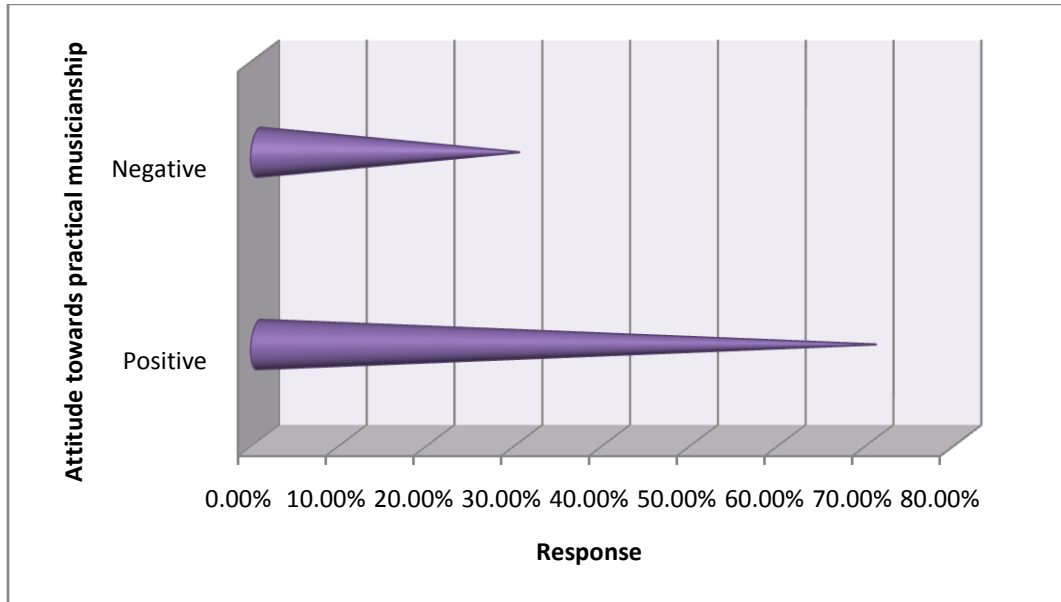
**Table 1. Sampling Frame**

<b>Sub-County (Stratified)</b>	<b>Bungoma West</b>	<b>Bungoma South</b>	<b>KilimiliB ungoma</b>	<b>Webuye West</b>	<b>Bungoma East</b>	<b>Bungoma North</b>	<b>Mt. Elgon</b>	<b>Total</b>
Secondary schools	30	60	31	30	51	51	17	260
Purposively sampled schools	4	2	4	1	2	1	1	15
Students (All form four in selected schools)	55	33	46	9	16	10	8	177
Teachers(Purposive sampling of music teachers)	5	2	6	1	3	1	1	19

While questionnaires and observation schedule were administered to students for data collection, other questionnaires, FGDs and personal interviews were administered to teachers. Document analysis was used to obtain data about teaching methodologies. To ascertain reliability of instruments used in this study; a pilot study was carried out in Kakamega County before the actual research. Following the data collection, analysis was done using descriptive statistics.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Teachers were asked to state in their opinion and observation, if their students liked music, this was purposed to be an indicator of the learners' attitudes towards practical musicianship. From the responses sourced from the 19 teachers, 68.4% of them indicated that their students had a positive attitude towards practical musicianship, while the remaining 31.6% indicated that their students had a negative attitude towards practical musicianship. A summary of the responses is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Teachers' responses on students' attitude towards practical musicianship**

When further asked how they motivated their learners to develop interest in music, the teachers expressed a number of ways as summarized in Table 2. From the findings presented in Table 2, in order to motivate their learners to like music, majority of the teachers interviewed allowed their students to spend more time interacting with the available music instruments and resources as depicted by 7(36.8%). This was followed by those who considered having their students experience the exposure to performing artists 5(26.35%) with only 1(5.3%) teacher having a platform for learners to interact and perform with other learners.

**Table 2. Frequency of student motivation by teachers**

<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
More time with music instruments	7	36.8
Exposure to performing Artists	5	26.3
Videos on paper popular musicians	3	15.8
Performing with learners	1	5.3
Rewards to Top performers	3	15.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>

In a focus group discussion that was conducted by the author to establish learner attitudes to practical musicianship, majority of the learners expressed enthusiasm and positive attitude towards practical musicianship. Majority 124 (70.3%) of the students indicated that they enjoyed the practical aspects of expressing their knowledge of music practically. The rest of the students 53 (29.7%) indicated a negative attitude towards practical musicianship. This was attributed to the fact that some students had earlier indicated that they are coerced to pick subjects for purposes of examinations. Coercion in itself is suggestive of the fact that some students may not have personally chosen the subject and therefore end up disliking it. When asked to elaborate on their responses, a student who has a positive attitude pointed out as follows:

I enjoy music...I would like to be a musician and that is why I participate in the school choir and church choir...although we have limited facilities in our school for practicing music, I have passion for Music....

It is clear that majority of the students of music like the subject and therefore their attitude towards practical musicianship can be viewed as malleable. Therefore, other factors, other than attitude are responsible for the low statistics on students taking up practical musicianship as a career.

Further responses from students' participation in musical activities outside class validate the finding that majority of the students of music had a positive attitude towards practical musicianship. However, there could be a possibility that some of the learners participate in a number of musical activities outside the class without having interest in the same, as a subject taught in class, some influence from peers or just to gain a chance to get out of school. As one of learners answered, "I just joined choir to get an opportunity to go out of schools and socialize."

The study found out that students who can play musical instruments are indicators of those who portray positive attitude towards practical musicianship. To further establish the attitude of the learners towards music, the students were able to execute some music assignment. This finding was further collaborated by a teacher's opinion that students have a passion for practical musicianship, and that some had enrolled for music careers while others wished to be performers in future.

Bentley (2008) corroborates this finding by arguing that attitudes take is dependent upon the environment in which learners grow up and the treatments they receive from both home and school. In this case, their exposure to musical instruments is key in developing their attitude towards practical musicianship. If success in music education is based upon the construction of positive attitudes among learners, then the evaluation of these attitudes is vital. Moreover, if learners' voices can be seen as a valuable source of educational evaluation and agent for school improvement', then knowledge of learners' attitudes and their reasons for holding them may provide useful information for all involved in the educational setting, including teachers of music, head teachers, and curriculum planners (Sanderson & Savva, 2014). As the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2003) denotes, while the development of attitudes has not always been an explicit focus of teaching in schools, it is increasingly being explicitly identified as a major goal of schooling and should, therefore, also be regarded as a significant outcome of the learning process.

## **CONCLUSION**

Most of the students of music showed a positive attitude towards practical musicianship with only a few responding negatively that their choice of the subject was not personal but was influenced by other factors other than their own liking. Coercion to choosing music as a subject

was therefore an influencing factor thus a likelihood of some students to dislike the subject. The lack of interest in the subject is a contributory factor to poor performance in music education in secondary schools.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It would be interesting to find out whether teachers' views and attitudes in the public secondary schools differ from those who work in private secondary schools. A similar survey study may be conducted in order to examine learners' attitudes and views towards the new music curriculum in order to cross analyze the findings with those of this study.

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