



MUSIC EDUCATION: AN UNEXPLOITED GOLDMINE IN KENYA

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Music making and performance are the main venues and avenues used to impart knowledge to learners in nursery and lower primary classes in Kenya. On its inception in 1984, the 8:4:4 system advocated for the implementation of a curriculum in which music was a compulsory and examinable subject at the primary school level, and an elective but examinable subject at the secondary and university levels. In the year 2000, the Ministry of Education made music to be neither a compulsory nor examinable subject in primary schools, and an elective and examinable subject in secondary schools. This paper is an assessment of the implications of the current situation of music education in Kenya.

On its inception in 1984, the 8:4:4 (8 years in primary, 4 years in secondary and 4 years in university) system of education in Kenya, advocated for the implementation of a curriculum in which music was a compulsory and examinable subject at the primary school level, and an elective but examinable subject at the secondary and university levels. This move encouraged young talented musicians to sharpen their skills in music making and performance. Today, people who underwent the 8:4:4 system, such as music teachers, music makers and performers earn a living from their varied professions in music.

Recently, in the year 2000, the Ministry of Education in Kenya made music to be neither a compulsory nor examinable subject in the primary schools. At the secondary school level, it was made an elective and examinable subject. This move has led to a difficult situation where very few teachers and students have an interest in the subject at the

primary school level. Consequently a negligible number of students who join secondary schools have background knowledge and/or interest in the subject. This vicious cycle replicates itself at various tertiary institutions and even at the university level. This paper's argument is guided by the following questions:

- (a) Why should the government invest in the collegiate training of music teachers, especially at the primary teacher level, only to underutilize these teachers at the end?
- (b) Owing to the high rate of unemployment in Kenya today, why should young talented Kenyans be denied a chance to develop the talent from which they would earn a living?
- (c) Why should we muzzle music, which has served as entertainment, and to impart knowledge and cultural values to the Kenyan society?
- (d) What are the solutions for the aforementioned questions?

Music Education

Music as a performing cultural art springs from people's experiences and reflects their aspirations. It is from this understanding that music education curricula have been developed in many countries across the world. Generally, objectives of an ideal/functional music education curriculum should focus on the following categories.

- (a) Those objectives that pertain to acquisition of basic skills and knowledge, such as reading and writing music;
- (b) Objectives that emphasize practical skills. These are achieved through performing of songs, dances and instruments;
- (c) Objectives that enable the learners to use their ability and skills in a productive manner. After acquiring the basic and practical skills, the learners use them to express their own ideas, feelings and experiences through the art of composing music and dance;

- (d) Finally, there are objectives that target positive social skills through the principles of unity, co-operation, self-identity and patriotism both locally and internationally.

These objectives attest to the fact that a functional music education curriculum encompasses wide learning areas within performing arts, creative arts and culture. Under this scope are the visual arts, verbal arts, movement and dance, music and drama. Therefore, the implementation of the music curriculum in its entirety is in itself a milestone in achieving well-rounded development of the learner in terms of the social, economic, physical and psychological spheres. Music education, contrary to the belief system of most curriculum developers and implementers, does not stop at the learning of music notation and singing. Group dances and vocal performances can enhance the spirit of unity, co-operation and tolerance among others. These virtues are achieved especially when students from different social backgrounds rehearse and perform folklore or dances from various traditions, both locally and internationally. I wish to recommend that whenever musics from cultures and localities foreign to the learner are taught, learned or performed, a synopsis regarding the cultural, psychological, philosophical and historical background be made available to the learners. In the Kenyan case, it may be important for greater emphasis to be put on performances drawn from Kenyan traditional musics and cultures in addition to the learning and performance of music from other parts of the world.

Music performance as a verbal and visual art embodies people's cultures. Therefore, reinforcement of music education can be one way of enhancing cultural identity and integration while at the same time guarding against cultural disintegration. Based on examples from developed countries, it becomes apparent that cultural preservation and identity are often related to rapid socio-economic and technological development. Indigenous knowledge systems embedded in respective cultures are actively integrated in areas such as verbal arts, visual arts, music, dance and movement, music therapy, and physical education.

In Africa, traditional dances, folk melodies and languages have been utilized in Zaire (the democratic republic of Congo), where many people earn a living from musical performances both at national and international levels (Wanyama & Okong'o, 2003). In Kenya, traditional African rhythms are the basic ingredients in the performance of entertaining music such as 'Benga' whose rhythmic and melodic structures are based on the traditional eight stringed lyre called *nyatiti* that is played by the Luo people of the Nyanza province in Kenya.

This paper argues that popular music should not be de-linked from the school music curriculum. Students should be encouraged to create their own music, perform music composed by other people, and perform music from their own cultures and from cultures foreign to them. They should be exposed to playing musical instruments from the African, Western and Eastern divides. The objectives of playing such music should be self-expression, exposure, entertainment and communication. Performance of music for different audiences can help develop human personality and character. The performers are always conscious of their appearances in public, what they perform and how they perform it. This consciousness can lead to virtues like courtesy, respect and general sensibility to various environments.

The Challenges

Many head teachers in Kenya believe that music education is expensive to be implemented due to the fact that in the formative stages schools may be required to purchase grand pianos or instruments of the western orchestra. However, from my experience, I know that it is one of the less costly subjects to initiate! Through improvisation, instruments like the western piano can be perfectly replaced by traditional *Pokot* thumb pianos, improvised marimbas, metalophones or even bottles filled with water to different levels. While many western wind instruments may be substituted by improvising the various traditional flutes such as *Kumulele* of the Bukusu or *Nzumari* and

Bun'go of the Mijikenda; various drum types and shakers may also be substituted for the percussion instruments. In sum, the African environment and resources can be used to enhance music education easily and cheaply. An example of using indigenous resources may be when traditional musicians become involved in imparting specialized performance skills, articulating culture-specific vocal skills and choreographing specific movements and dance steps.

The case in Kenya is that sudden educational neglect has impacted negatively on music education and music teaching at all levels of learning. Since music is not examined at the primary level, teachers and pupils do not tend to take it seriously. In fact, at the primary school level, classes scheduled for music education are often used for teaching other examined subjects like English language and mathematics. Since academic excellence in Kenyan schools, and to some extent tertiary institutions, is based on the level of the mean score obtained by candidates in annual national examinations, a mechanism should be put in place so that the annually non-examined subjects, such as music, may be more effectively taught.

Attitudinal factors may also be causing the dwindling number of learners/candidates for music education positions each year. At the secondary school level, where the subject is optional and examined, the inadequately prepared pupils in music education at the primary school level commonly develop a negative attitude toward it. The optional status of the subject sends signals such as: 'after all it is not an important subject to be learned.' In the long run this attitude and situation can spill over to the tertiary institutions, like diploma teachers' colleges and universities.

Because of this situation many teachers who were trained at the university level as music teachers are turning to teaching their second subjects and abandoning music altogether. At Moi University in Kenya, in the past two years, I have noted four cases of teachers initially trained as music teachers enrolling to pursue higher education in fields other than music education. When asked as to why they made such a move, they cite their prediction

of a lack of marketability for music teachers in Kenya in the near future. Likewise, teacher trainees at primary teacher colleges often don't regard music as a worthwhile subject because of music not being given any emphasis in the primary school curriculum. After all, many teacher trainees may not teach music except for a few who may teach in private schools that may offer music for foreign exam purposes, such as the London G.C.E. So, why concentrate on it? What then is the logic of the government spending resources on training personnel, especially at the collegiate level, when the teachers are not utilized?

If we consider the benefits that may accrue from the implementation of music education, especially at this time when unemployment is rampant in Kenya it is logical to think twice before we de-emphasize music education in Kenyan schools. The Kenyan case, where the curriculum designers and implementers, are abandoning music education at the time when other countries, the world over, are clamoring for a strengthening of the subject is a troublesome situation. It is because of my furry at the unreasonable action by the ministry of education in Kenya that I decided to title this paper: *Music Education: An Unexploited Goldmine in Kenya*. On the basis of this paper's argument, music education is the nexus and the 'mother of several other subjects.' For instance, it can be used to help teach other subjects such as mathematics, languages and religion; just to mention but a few. Its richness and versatility qualifies it to be termed a "goldmine" that should be exploited to the maximum for the purpose of various and varied human needs in the modern world.

Recommendations

- The ministry of education in Kenya should reconsider its decision to make music 1) an unexamined subject at the primary school level and 2) an elective subject at the secondary school level, in order to encourage music teaching, learning and development at subsequent levels.

- The government of Kenya should set up institutes of music theory and performance. Such institutes should nurture budding talents in music making and performance as a career. Here priority should be given to the preservation and performance of African traditional musics complemented with musics from other cultures of the world. The institutes should emphasize choreography as part of the theory and practice of performance. Costume design and use especially with a modern context in mind should be encouraged. Improving on traditional costumes and instruments by giving them a more aesthetic look and hence adding more value to them may enhance the learner's interest in using them. Care should clearly be taken to retain the tuning ranges of the traditional instruments and the authenticity of the traditional costumes.
- Music, dance and drama should be integrated under one umbrella of arts and culture. This is because the three units heavily complement and depend on each other in the context of African music performance. In Africa, teaching music as a separate entity makes the learning process an incomplete circuit and hence almost meaningless. The University of Zululand has achieved positive results by merging music and drama departments into the center for arts and culture (Seleke, 2003). Likewise, since 2001, the Creative arts department at Moi University – Kenya, has made tremendous strides towards sensibility in the functionality of creative arts by initiating music and dance courses to go along with theatre arts courses.
- Subjects should be merged with others or discarded from the curriculum after extensive investigation by experts into the relevance of the content and the implications of such decisions. Education should have a rational philosophy: Removing musical creativity from the curriculum and yet emphasizing creativity in the Kenyan national goals of education may be self-defeating. The good will of policy makers is necessary for boosting music education. Policy makers should not support moves leading to the neglect of music education and hence regarding

and or portraying it as a less important subject. The ministry of education inspectorate should explain and defend the importance of music as an interdisciplinary subject. Therefore, if harnessed to the full music may serve as a teaching resource.

- In Kenya, identification of talents in music and other arts comes too late in life for the nurturing of talent. Younger people can often conceptualize learning faster than older people. According to Suzuki in Hoffer (1993) beginning music instruction, especially learning to play instruments, is more effective at an early age.
- African diploma colleges and universities in general and Kenyan ones in particular, should diversify the content of the music courses that are offered. They should not limit themselves to offering music courses with a pedagogical component. The courses offered should put more emphasis on improvisation and the playing of African instruments. There is a need to examine what our African instruments can achieve and offer in terms of pitch ranges and timbre. The use of African instruments should be encouraged due to accessibility, low cost, and authenticity.
- Music educators should encourage participatory approaches in their teaching-learning processes. Theoretical background should complement the practical aspects of music education. Learners should be initiated into creative music making and be encouraged to participate in music festival competitions such as the annual *Kenya Music Foundation Festival*. Apart from learning the spirit of competition that students can apply in other spheres of life, such festivals offer them a chance to learn from the unique attributes of other competitors and appreciate other people's talents. Furthermore, involvement in such activities keeps the students busy, hence averting their involvement in destructive activities such as the rampant school strikes and other forms of unrest frequently occurring in some Kenyan schools.

- With education becoming multidimensional and adopting entrepreneurial perspectives/approaches in the 21st century, music education should be geared towards this direction in order to realize tangible results in the human socio-economic sphere. Music should be seen as any other commodity that may be marketed for sale. Its benefits should be highlighted and reinforced through the media. Students' creative works should be appraised, encouraged, improved and exposed to consumers in relevant markets.
- Music teachers should exploit the resources of advanced music technology by using electronic keyboards and computer packages available on the market, such as Finale, Encore, Sibelius, etc., in teaching, processing and recording music. They should incorporate the packages in their teaching instructions where necessary. Apart from making learning enjoyable and interesting, this dimension may encourage creativity.
- Music teachers should strive to be well-rounded musicians themselves before embarking on teaching students about musicianship. They should focus on creativity and upgrading themselves with more inclination to practical music, as opposed to an emphasis on the theory of music. They should give students a chance to express themselves and hence realize their potential. Once they equip themselves with skills in vocal and instrumental music, they may be in a better position to advise other musicians about how to achieve quality entertainment and effective communication in musical performances.
- Music and musicianship should be taught for reasons beyond preparation for annual examinations. Instead, acquisition of practical skills should be emphasized. Although such annual evaluations motivate and attract standards, the process should not be overemphasized at the expense of practical skills and their application to real life contexts.

The implementation of these recommendations would go a long way in the realization of the benefits of *Music Education: An Unexploited Goldmine in Kenya*.

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