Effect of Aural Tests on Choice of Music as a Study Subject by Muslim Students in Mombasa County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Music education has a global acceptance as it helps improve and promote/develop creativity and language skills among students. However, among the Muslim community, excessive instrumental music is not given prominence. This comes from the Hadiths by the prophet Muhammad that forbid music. In Kenya, the coastal region is mostly comprised of the Muslim community who hardly choose to pursue Music subject. This prompted this study that evaluated the effect of the inclusion of the aural tests in the curriculum on the choice of Music as a study subject by Muslim students in Mombasa County, Kenya. The study used a survey research design. The sample population consisted of 27 participants as follows: 2 music teachers, 8 students, 8 parents, 1 Kenya Institute Curriculum Development Officer at the national level, 1 Quality Assurance and Standard Officer and 7 career masters. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, which was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Findings show that there were negative perception aural tests (listening and notating non-Islamic music) due to religious requirement as well as ignorance that led to Muslim students dropping Music subject. In conclusion, despite the knowledge of the Muslim parents at the coast region of Kenya on their children choice of Music as a study subject, they do not influence them from dropping it at senior secondary. The teaching by Prophet Muhammad against Music and its propagation by the Imams and other Muslim leaders at the coast of Kenya led to most Muslim sponsored schools in Kenya to disadvantage against choosing Music subject as a career path. The study recommends that priority should be given to Islamic content in music studies and encouraging Muslim communities in Kenya to embrace music as a career subject.

Keywords: Aural Test, Mombasa, Music Curriculum, Music Education, Muslim.

I. INTRODUCTION

The heart of all good music-making and performance lies in listening [1]. Developing good aural skills is an important component of any music education. It is the ability to hear how music works that help students with all aspects of their music-making and learning [2]. According to [3], aural testing (ear training) is a skill by which musicians learn to identify, solely by hearing, pitches, intervals, melody, chords, rhythms, and other basic elements of music. Moreover, the application of this skill is analogous to taking dictation in written/spoken language. As a process, ear training is, in essence, the inverse of sight-singing, the latter being analogous to reading a written text aloud without prior opportunity to review the material [4]. Ear training is typically a component of formal musical training.

According to [5], aural skills are an essential ingredient in music performance ability. A number of researches have shown that aural experience is the central core of musicianship [6]-[8]. Muslims embrace aural skills over instrumentation in music [9]. There is a long leaving history of revelation (tanzil) that gives a high degree of religious values to the exact words used by God through Gabriel to speak to Muhammad [10]. Furthermore, the revelation was aural, and transmission has continued to take place in aural mode.

Student of music must participate in aural tests to establish skill levels and understanding of music. Aural tests are therefore administered from the instrument [11]. These are carefully graded from basic recognition of rhythm and memory of short phrases to tests demanding well-developed aural perception and discrimination. However, Islamic religion does not permit the use of instruments in performance according to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, yet the teaching of the aural test is done by the use of musical instruments [12]. Thus, the study investigated whether the inclusion of aural tests in the curriculum...
discouraged Muslim students from opting for music in Mombasa County, Kenya.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Globally, it is a rare occurrence for Muslim students to pursue Music subject as a career subject. Music is forbidden regarding the playing of musical instruments, singing and dancing. This comes from the Hadiths by the prophet Muhammad that forbid music. In Kenya, the coastal region is mostly comprised of the Muslim community who seldom choose Music subject as an examinable subject and a future career path. In this case, following the strict doctrine of prophet Muhammad over music, Muslim students participating in an aural test that requires singing or chanting musical lyrics or rhythm, becomes Haram (forbidden) and punishable. The aural test violates the laws of Islam and the prophet’s decree; Muslim students might not pursue music as a course because of strict adherence to prophets’ decree. Besides, there always is a perception that music taught in classrooms is of no value to Muslims because it is not applicable in their reverence services.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

| Music Curriculum Content | Number of Muslim Students who choose to pursue music subject |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Aural Tests              |                                                              |

- Subject cluster by individual schools
- Influence by friends and class teacher
- Character of the subject teacher
- Past KCSE Music results

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive survey research design was used in this study. Data were obtained from a sample rather than the entire population. The study area was Mombasa County; focusing on Muslim sponsored secondary schools offering Music subject. The target population consisted of all students in secondary schools in Mombasa County currently taking or once took music subject. According to the Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO), Mombasa County, there are forty-four (44) secondary schools in the county having a total of twenty thousand and five (20,005) students. Out of the forty-four (44) schools, twenty-eight (28) are Muslim community-sponsored while sixteen (16) are non-Muslim community sponsored. At the time of the study, there was only one school offering Music subject and had a population of eighty-seven (87) music students: form one forty-four (44) students, form two twenty-one (21) students, form three–ten (10) students and form four–twelve (12) students. The accessible population consisted of Muslim students in Mombasa County who once took music as a subject and dropped it. They were only eight (8) students, three (3) music teachers, one (1) Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) officer, county QASO and career masters.

Sample size determination was conducted through purposive sampling that selected all the form 3 and 4 Muslim students who took music at junior secondary and dropped it at senior secondary; they were 9 in total, the 3 music teachers in the county, the KICD officer at the national level and QASO at the county level were selected all through purposive sampling. 9 parents to form 3 and 4 Muslim students who dropped music were also purposively selected. 30% of career masters from the Muslim community-sponsored schools were part of the sample.

Data collection was carried out using questionnaires, and interviews. Besides, content analysis was used to get the data from KNEC annual reports, KCSE past papers and examination schedule documents. The equipment included a tape recorder and a camera. Validity was attained through questionnaires test-retest to check whether they generated the intended data as per the study objectives. Reliability was achieved through Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.82 thus data reliability was assured in this study. Quantitative data were analysed using a statistical package for social scientists (SPSS) Version 25.0 and presented in tabular form. Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and presented in a narration format.

V. RESULTS

The researcher investigated whether the parents of the students knew about their secondary school-going students who previously partook in Music subject in junior secondary and dropped it at junior secondary. Fig. 1 showed that 87% of the parents knew about their students had taken Music subject at junior secondary and dropped at senior secondary.

![Fig. 1. Knowledge by parents about their students taking Music subject at Junior Secondary.](image)

The research delved to establish the influence of the aural test on the choice of music by Muslim students. Table 1 illustrates the findings.

The results in Table 1 showed that students learning aural tests were of value to their future life as Muslim which was supported by approximately half of the Muslim parents/guardians (50.0%). It was established that Muslim students (37.5%) never found it hard to answer aural tests question’s because melodies used in aural tests seem to be far from Islamic music. Western style harmonic used in cadences could not be hardly followed by 37.5% of Muslim studentsMoreover, it was established that it was not difficult for a Muslim student to learn aural test topic because facilities used e.g., upright pianos were never owned and learnt by Muslims as indicated by approximately half of the respondents (50.0%).

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TABLE II: KRUSKAL-WALLIS H TEST ON AURAL TEST ON CHOICE OF MUSIC SUBJECT BY MUSLIM STUDENTS

| Aural Test                                                                 | Strong Agree or Agree | Undecided | Strongly Disagree or Disagree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Learning aural tests is of no value to the future life of a Muslim student | 37.5%                  | 12.5%     | 50.0%                        |
| A Muslim student finds it hard to answer aural tests question’s because melodies used in aural tests seem to be far from Islamic music. | 37.5%                  | 25.0%     | 37.5%                        |
| The harmonic Western-style passages used in cadences can hardly be followed by a Muslim student because Islamic music is never in such harmonic form. | 25.0%                  | 37.5%     | 37.5%                        |
| It is so difficult for a Muslim to learn aural test topics because facilities used e.g., upright pianos are never owned and learnt by Muslims | 12.5%                  | 37.5%     | 50.0%                        |

VI. CONCLUSION

Despite the knowledge of the Muslim parents at the coast region of Kenya on their children choice of Music as a subject, they do not influence them from dropping it at senior secondary. The teaching by Prophet Muhammad against Music and its propagation by the Imams and other Muslim leaders at the coast of Kenya led to most Muslim sponsored schools in Kenya to disadvantage against choosing Music subject as a career path.

VII. RECOMMENDATION

Aural testing is critical for musicianship and must be designed to fit into Islamic culture that is acceptable to them. Promoting Islamic content in music studies and encouraging Muslim communities in Kenya to embrace music as a career subject. The performance (instrumentation) of music, which has had serious condemnation by the teaching of the Prophet, could be moderated by the Islamic leadership to incorporate the applicable ones.

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Dr Sumba Shitambasi was born at Madero Green Village in the then Lubao Sub-location Kakamega. He received his basic education at Bukhaywa Primary School. He further studied at Chavakali High School and proceeded to Advance at St. Mary’s Yala. He initially trained as a Diploma Teacher of Music and pursued the subject at Kenyatta University. Dr Sumba holds a PhD degree in Music, Makerere University. In addition, he has successfully undergone the British music examination series by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (London) under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, up to the final grade.

While teaching at Kabarnet, he was sponsored for a piano technology course (Repair and Tuning of Pianos) at music Wiebach, Forum Staglitz, Berlin (Germany). He has taught music at Matera Secondary School (Kuria), Itierio High School (Kisii), Kabarnet High School (Baringo) and Butere Girls High School. He established an Institute of music at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST), Kakamega, where he teaches the subject.

A unique quality about Dr Sumba is his ownership of more than one hundred musical instruments and being able to at least play each, almost well.

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