Challenges and Innovations in Africanising Music in the Classroom: A Kenyan Experience

Ernest Patrick MONTE [1], Mellitus N. WANYAMA [2] and Doseline W. KIGURU [3,]

[1] *Kabarak University, P.O. Box Private Bag, Kabarak, 20157, Kenya*
Tel: +254 717 467 230, Email: monte0801@gmail.com

[2] *Kabarak University, P.O. Box Private Bag, Kabarak, 20157, Kenya*
Tel: +254 722 313 515, Email: mwanyama@kabarak.ac.ke

[3] *The British Institute in Eastern African, P.O. Box 30710 GPO, Laikipia Rd, Nairobi, Kenya,*
Tel: +254 717 256 501, Email: dosiekiguru@yahoo.com

Abstract: This paper interrogates possibilities of Africanizing music in the classroom against the backdrop of modernity, innovations and challenges that come with globalization and modern technology. The major questions that the paper attempts to answer are: why is it necessary to Africanise the music classroom in Kenya today? What are the major challenges in Africanising music in the classroom? What are the innovative possibilities that are likely to emerge in the process of Africanising music in the classroom in view of the effect of modernity on African cultural arts such as music? Basically, the scope of the paper is limited to classroom instruction with regard to creativity in the process of music making by employing elements of music in the context of African music philosophy, theory and practice. However, where applicable, examples from the Western music making perspectives are referred to. Theoretically, the paper is underpinned by the three domains of learning in Bloom's Taxonomy; namely: Cognitive, Psychomotor and Affective as expounded by Benjamin Bloom (1948). The study adopts a qualitative approach with a survey design. Data was collected from purposively sampled informants –mainly music lecturers from selected Kenyan universities. The collected data was analysed and interpreted with a focus on answering the earlier raised study questions. Finally, conclusions and way forward is made.

Keywords: Africanising Music; Western Music; Bloom's taxonomy; culture; tradition; tradition

1.0 Background and Introduction

This paper explores the concept of Africanising the teaching of music within the frame of the Kenyan classroom. It is important to note here that this study is cognisant of the complexities that underlie the use of the word 'Africa/Africanising' and in this context it is used to refer to the process of relying on examples of African music and approaches in the process of teaching in Kenya. These African examples are not only limited to the text but also embrace the application of music elements such as performance, composition and arrangement that borrow heavily from the African art tradition. The study is also aware of the dangers associated with the general homogenisation of Africa as a continent and of African music. The continent is made up of different ethnic and linguistic groups whose cultures are not necessarily similar. The use of the concept of African music or Africanising music in the classroom in this context refers to the

reliance on cultural traditions that have been deemed traditionally African in terms of aesthetics, form and content.

Further, the focus on African music in this study does not represent a contradiction with modernity but rather approaches it from the perspective that culture is dynamic and is capable of changing to suit different circumstances and environments (Monte, 2015:137). In this aspect, relying on African music in the classroom will not only focus on the pre-colonial African setting but it will be a process that appreciates the dynamism of African culture and music, tracing its growth and development over different historical and political eras (Ibid). Traditionally, however, African music has previously been presented in contradiction with Western, or rather European music. As Philip V. Bohlman (2001:201) notes, a definition and characterisation of European music was historically obtained by comparing European music with musics outside Europe. A history of colonial and postcolonial domination in Kenyan and various other African countries has ensured that the teaching methods introduced into formal education by the colonial powers persist to date. In the teaching of music in Kenya, for instance, this history has resulted in the continued privileging of Western music tradition at the expense of local music traditions and cultures. As Kofi Agawu (2003: 230) explains, this history has continued to ensure that African music education and appreciation tools are framed within Western traditions.

This paper, however, is not calling for the neglect of Western music but is instead emphasising on the need to elevate the use of African music more especially in the African classroom where the learners as well as educators are more familiar with aspects of this music even outside of the classroom framework. It is informed by a need to have learners that are well rounded in the music of the world.

This study is informed by the shortcomings of Western music instruction and approaches in teaching music in Kenya which fails to articulate some concepts regarding African music. Indeed, writing about African music and the academy in 'Ethnomusicology, the Music Canon, and African Music', Jean Ngoya Kidula (2006) argues that "[m]ore that 100 years since African music began to be documented in print, audio, and video formats, it continues to be presented and represented by positions, theories, and methods associated with and derived from Europe and North America" (99). Kidula calls for the creation and use of theoretical and methodological tools that are African oriented for the purpose of analysing African music. We argue further for the need to rely on aspects that characterise African music in terms of production and performance for the benefit of the African music academy.

One of the major challenges identified by different scholars in regard to the continued neglect of African music as a reliable source of academic material has been the centrality of orality in the definition of African music traditions. Kidula (2006) further acknowledges that:

> For a Western ideology that situated precise records in written script, the orality of African music complicated matters […] Oral history was questioned as a repository of accurate and reliable historical information and data, particularly before and during colonial occupation. (101)

This paper argues that this notion that relegates African music to a lower position based on its oral tradition has continued to affect the appreciation of this art not only in the socio-

economic and political environment of its production but also in the African academy which continues to privilege Western music.

The process of Africanising the music programmes in the Kenyan schools is informed by the general need for a decolonisation of the African academy. It joins hand with various African studies scholars calling for the need to put emphasis on African research and intellectual empowerment informed by data collected locally, and theoretical and methodological tools developed by Africanist scholars and oriented towards the development of the continent in academics and research. In the Kenyan context, the process of Africanising the music learning environment borrows heavily from the decolonising project developed by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) in the framework of teaching and learning literature in Africa. Writing in *Decolonising the Mind* (1981) wa Thiong'o focused on the syllabus of the Departments of English in African universities in which English literature was prioritised over local, and in general, African literature. Wa Thiong'o recollects that in 1968, a few African scholars and researchers at the University of Nairobi called for the abolition of the English Department questioning "the underlying assumption that the English tradition and the emergence of the modern West were the central root of Kenya's –and Africa's consciousness and cultural heritage. They rejected the underlying notion that Africa was an extension of the West" (89).

In general, therefore, we are calling for a reliance on African cultures and art as the canon in teaching African music. As the results from this study demonstrate, this will require inputs from different cultural stakeholders including learners and educators as well as significant changes in cultural perceptions by the society as well as a change in government policies placing emphasis on the value of local cultural knowledges.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of this study is to present the necessities of the need to Africanise the teaching of music within the Kenyan classroom. It is also to provide the frameworks for this process which falls under the movement of the decolonisation of the African academia. The environment under which formal knowledge has been acquired in Kenya is of Western orient and geared towards meeting Western education objectives with no or little bearing to the African context of life. It acknowledges that unless the structures of formal knowledge acquisition are in tandem with the needs of the Kenyan academy, Africanising the elements of teaching music in the music classroom in Kenya would bear very little fruits.

3.0 The Methodological Approaches Used

The study adopts a qualitative approach with a survey design. It involved the collection of data through a questionnaire approach. The questions were distributed mainly to music educators in Kenya who are directly involved in teaching as well as developing the music curricula at different learning levels in Kenya. The questionnaire was designed to collect the relevant information needed in the process of Africanising the Kenyan classroom by asking questions that provoked the respondents to reconsider their teaching methodologies as well as to provide suggestions for change in relation to the process of decolonising the African classroom.

The data was collected from purposively sampled informants –mainly music lecturers from selected Kenyan universities. In view of the sample population for this study, the theoretical perspective of this research was informed by Benjamin Bloom's (1948) classifications of intellectual behaviour and learning. The study acknowledges the significance of Bloom's taxonomy comprised of cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains as significant tools of identifying and measuring progressively sophisticated learning of music informed by African culture and art.

As demonstrated in the next section of this article, the collected data was analysed and interpreted with a focus on answering the following research questions:

1. Is it necessary to Africanise the music classroom in Kenya today? If yes, what are the challenges involved in the actualisation of this project?
2. What are the shortcomings and failures of the predominant reliance on Western music instruction approaches in teaching music in Kenya?
3. What are the innovative possibilities that are likely to emerge in the process of Africanising music in the classroom in view of the effect of modernity on African cultural arts such as music?
4. In which ways do music educators employ elements of music, in the African context, to the three domains of learning in Bloom's Taxonomy (1948): Cognitive, Psychomotor and Affective, when teaching music in the classroom?
5. From the perspective of music educators, what are the suggestions for the way forward in regard to Africanising the music classroom in Kenya?

4.0 Results and Analysis: the Failure of Western Music Instruction Tools

The data collected through the questionnaires demonstrate that the history of teaching music in Kenya is heavily reliant on Western music teaching techniques and examples, a process that has led to the marginalisation of African music and performance tools, techniques and aesthetics in the Kenyan classrooms. This has resulted in the alienation of the African academy from the local music production and performance as well as the general canon. This method that continues to privilege Western music and teaching approaches has also ensured that African music continues to exist outside the canon not only at the academic level but in the socio-political arena as well. The information received through the data collected further point to the fact that predominantly Western music instruction approaches in teaching music in Kenya fails to articulate concepts regarding technique, repertoire, creativity and expression in African music. For instance, African music is rich in expressiveness and aestheticism, rhythm and pitch variety, thereby enhancing the understanding, identification, use and practice of concepts such polyrhythm, heterophony and microtones in music.

According to the data received for this study, the principal focus on Western music instruction approaches in the Kenyan music curriculum fails to capture various aspects of African music such as expression, creativity and technique. In terms of technique, Western music uses western notation while African music relies on memory and performance for preservation of music. Instruction in African music therefore involves informal and non-formal approaches, which may lack in purely Westernised classrooms. For instance, Nicholas Cook (1998) notes that

staff notation describes music as separate notes while in some traditions, the 'notes between notes', so to speak, are responsible for *effect* in music. Western systems of notation therefore fail to capture this aspect of African music. Some non-written concepts and ornaments of African music such as ululation, heaving and yodelling may also fail to be captured within the major and minor scales predominantly used in Western music instruction and which do not fully take care of the microtonal pitches and other vocal effects. For instance, rhythms such as 5/8, 7/8, etc, found in African music are termed irregular in Western music contexts. A good example would include a song such as "*Ee nyumba ya mware witu*" an Agikuyu folk song is in 5/8 time.

Further, as one respondent argued, the predominantly western system of instruction has previously been termed authoritarian because it fails to encourage creativity and neither does it allow deviation from the 'norm', therefore resulting in a devastating impact on artistic and practical creativity in the context of African cultural art. Indeed, the repetitive aspect of African music has been termed monotonous and an indication of lack of development to the western ear. This has discouraged the creativity this practice was intended to encourage and develop. In essence, therefore, the functionalism of music in the traditional context is sacrificed at the expense of music education as aesthetic education from a Western "art for art's sake" perspective.

This study, therefore, affirms the necessity for a process that seeks to decolonise the African music academy, especially in the Kenyan context. It argues that if the education system is structured in the context of the African environment, it makes it possible to draw and use methods and examples relevant to the local people and cultures. As one respondent notes, for example, "term and signs used in music making should be of African nature and also internationally accepted for Kenyan learners to receive worldwide recognition."

The data argues that this is a significant project since the learners will be starting from the familiar (African music) moving outwards to the unfamiliar which includes, but is not limited to, Western music. Such a process, we argue, will provide more meaning and relevance to the learning process. In addition, the learning process will get to be more interactive as both the teachers and learners, borrowing from their cultures and daily experience, will be able to contribute to the learning materials such as songs, poems, rhymes, chants and even instruments which they may already be familiar with, before moving on to learn about music from the rest of the world.

This shift in focus will help to sustain repertoire and techniques. We argue that adoption of this music into the classroom will ensure reception, preservation and even development of African music. It will also enhance the blend among formal, informal and non-formal systems of learning music due to incorporation of African approaches in a system that had purely Western approaches to teaching and learning. It is a sure way of making explicit an area of music that has always been ignored, yet relevant in teaching and learning in the country. The music will therefore fill the void in educational materials by providing materials for the preservation and development of cultural heritage.

4.1 Challenges to the decolonisation/Africanisation of the music classroom

The environment under which formal knowledge has been acquired in Kenya is of Western orientation and geared towards meeting Western education objectives with no or little bearing to the African context of life. Unless the structures of formal knowledge acquisition are in tandem with the needs of the Kenyan academy, Africanising the elements of teaching music in the music classroom in the country would bear very little fruits. This study is aware of the many institutional, political, social and economic challenges that may hinder the realisation of a project seeking to Africanise the teaching of music in Kenya. Some of the major challenges however are framed within the social realm where both learners and teachers may be reluctant to change a system that has been in place for a very long period of time. According to the information gathered from the data collected, because of a teaching history that has continued to privilege Western music while alienating the African learner from African music, some learners in Kenya may be opposed to learning African music or using African music in the classroom due to already formed negative opinions about this music. Some look down upon it and therefore may not easily accept to incorporate it in the music classroom. In the same light, some repertoire may not be allowed into the classroom as some Kenyan cultures and religions place taboo on performance of their music. Chong (2013) writes that one of the issues surrounding multicultural music education is the need to consult culture-bearers on their views regarding use and transmission of their materials, and ethics of recontextualisation.

This Africanisation project may also face challenges related to attitudes of policy makers, teachers and learners borne out of lack of exposure to a variety of, relevance of, and need for, African music. This has mainly been brought about by monoculturalism where Western music has almost always been the only frame of reference within as well as outside the academic circles. The fast disappearance of experts in African music such as instrumentalists and dancers due to natural attrition and the influences of mass media, among others, has also played a significant role in the formation of a negative attitude towards African music as a tool of instruction in the formal classroom.

Apart from a change in attitudes and perceptions in regard to African music, the other major challenge in this project would be that of developing appropriate strategies for teaching and learning since there is a clear lack of sufficient teaching materials and books featuring folk songs and other forms of African music. It is important to retaliate here the centrality of orality in African art and music and although there is the problem of insufficient published teaching materials, the learners as well as teachers have a wide reservoir of information on African music that is available orally from different communities in Kenya. However, it becomes a major challenge when we consider the enormous diversity of music materials versus limitations of time, language and resources. As one respondent aptly noted:

> Kenya is a multi-lingual/ethnic society consisting of myriad subgroups within the approximately 42 speech communities. The main challenge in use of African music will be in the viability of their wider dissemination in schools if written in a few of the languages. There will be a possibility of students from some groups not being able to identify with the music. Thoughts on unifying the learning materials, to make sense across the country are mandatory.

The project of Africanising the music curriculum in Kenya, therefore, will have to pay particular attention to the challenges that come with orality in the process of creating a music archive relevant to the classroom and one which does not exclude and marginalise learners and teachers as well.

4.2 Expected innovative possibilities in the process of Africanising cultural arts

One of the major expected innovative possibilities in this project is a much needed blend in the formal, informal and non-formal systems of learning that come as a result of modern technology. This would lead to the development of a musical language that would be accepted in Kenya, Africa and internationally. This would include the notation systems, terms and signs and also the need for benchmarking to see how these innovations can be used to reflect and be applied in teaching the same concepts in the Western situations to cause students of such innovations to be accepted internationally.

The project is also expected to provide room for integration between different communities in Kenya. In view of the effects of modernity on African cultural arts such as music, this project will promote multiculturalism where different peoples and musics lead largely separate lives but with music education targeting the "roots" of learners, it is expected to bring about the enjoyment of music in its cultural contexts. The project will also promote interculturalism where there is loose contacts and exchange between cultures and include simple forms of fusion. It is also expected to promote transculturism which involves an in-depth exchange of approaches and ideas in the presentation of theory and rudiments of music, and discussions on the role of music for the community' aesthetics or culture. This is with the understanding that integration of cultural diversity leads to ethnic appreciation, co-existence and tolerance.

It is also expected to promote artistry in our African music such as by modifying tunes' creativity, construction of local African instruments and modification of costume or décor in the context of performance. For instance, there is a possibility of finding music in various forms such as vocal or instrumental, audio or video, rearranged and/or recontextualised for performance in various settings. This will provide the teachers and learners with a variety of repertoire in order to make choices according to their needs as well as to improve on their creativity.

By embracing the African music making process and analysis, there is also a possibility of gaining more academic and cultural knowledge on popular music, a genre which is more familiar with most learners and educators. This will mainly be due to the fact that most of this music is in language(s) that most of them are familiar with, such as Kiswahili.

4.3 Relying on Bloom's taxonomy in the Africanisation project

Focusing on Bloom's taxonomy of the domains of learning, this study acknowledges that in the African context, music is beyond song and dance. It involves singing, playing of instruments, dancing, masquerading and dramatizing among other performance techniques. The cognitive aspect of the learner would therefore include perceiving and creating dance movements, dramatizing and even masquerading in line with its cultural function. It will also include singing of African folk songs and mastering the text. Further, application of the cognitive domain would

also comprise classroom discussions, student research and presentations and essays on types and roles of music and music instruments in the traditional as well as modern day African music.

The psychomotor would involve propelling the dance in the performance by engaging the various organs of the body and mastering the playing of different African instruments by the students in class as well as in the field. The enjoyment part, which is an important component in African music performance, would cater for the affective domain of Bloom's taxonomy in learning when teaching music in the classroom. This would also include the sharing of music from various cultures, co-ordination and cooperation in performance, as well as calls for understanding attitudes and feelings of other peoples' culture. It would also focus on encouraging students to attend and participate in traditional music-making activities such as in the Kenya Music Festivals, Bomas of Kenya presentations and other cultural festivals in the country.

5.0 Way forward and Conclusion

This paper calls for the need to engage African contemporary conditions and challenges in designing music curriculum to make learning of music real and meaningful to the Kenyan education system. The following points were raised as significant in this project and as pointing to the way forward in regards to the realisation of this goal:

- There is need to borrow heavily from African instructional methods that have historically continued to be used in passing knowledge on African music and culture in the traditional African society. The music academy in Kenya should customise and modify these teaching tools in order to fit into the current music curriculum.
- It is important to invest in resource persons who are well versed with the knowledge of different African cultures and music. This will be in addition to developing an African music archive to preserve local knowledges that can in turn be used in the teaching and learning process.
- Learners should be exposed to African music production within the formal educational settings from the time they start their schooling. In this sense, the school curricula need to be restructured to emphasize on the use of the locally available materials with emphasis on African music.
- Policy makers, education managers, teachers, parents, guardians and caretakers should be sensitized on the importance of African music through the use of mass and social media, public forums and any other accessible media.
- Government (both national and county) needs to set aside grants for more research in African music and to encourage scholars carrying out research in this field to disseminate their findings and recommendations for purposes of education and sensitization.
- Many more music-making activities such as festivals and clubs need to be initiated and encouraged with special emphasis on African music. Venues include churches, pre-school and school settings, colleges and universities, communities, and individual groups in addition to the Kenya music festivals.

From the data collected, this study further suggests that use of African music examples and approaches will help infuse values, mores and customs from African cultures and societies,

thus acquainting learners to their environment more. This may influence their attitude towards this music and its reception. In conclusion, therefore, there is need to develop African approaches in teaching music in Kenya. The data findings from this study suggest the need to revise the music curricula in Kenya through the project of Africanisation of the music classroom which will allow the use of both African and Western music training approaches in teaching music in a process that aims at providing an all-encompassing learning process.

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