

The Study of Popular Music on the Academic Performance of Students with in Agogo Asante Akyem -North District: Any Association for Academic Discourse?

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Abstract: There remains an age-long perception that listening to music whilst undertaking an academic examination/exercise enabled students to subdue stress and augment their concentration leading to higher scores. Nonetheless, there are varied perceptions as regards the subject matter as others posit that music at the background of an examination hall or class only leads to divided attention of examinees, wasting their precious time and that performance of students ebbs more on talent or motivation other than mere playing of music at the background.

These uncertainties and ambiguities informed the basis of this quantitative study using primary data in the form of questionnaires administered to 130 respondents from a population of 350. The researchers hypothesized: students studying music performed better than their counterparts without music orientation and the results confirmed the hypothesis especially for quantitative courses, leading to a recommendation that the study of music should be taken seriously by educational stakeholders due to its industrial and academic opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa, especially Ghana.

The researchers further recommended that a general stance should not be taken against students listening to music during studies but should be treated on individual course merit since most students indicated in this research that they can comfortably listen to music and concurrently study when it comes to quantitative or numerical courses such as Mathematics etc.

Key words: Academic performance, popular music

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Adjepong and Obeng,(2018), the importance of music is known in every society in the world. Music exists everywhere and there is no part of the world or society where music is not used or made in one way or the other. As such, music, the oldest of all the arts is used in various ways in societies all over the world. All societies have developed a structure for shaping sounds that fit into their cultural environment which they refer to as their music. Most societies use music as a means of expressing their emotions and social sentiments. This is because, music has the power to create feelings and emotions in a quick and effective manner. What in a book, would require many sentences for description, in

music, can often be conveyed by just one measure or one chord (Adjepong et al., 2018). In a discussion on music and meaning, Nyarko (2016), posited that music excites emotions through its capacity to inhibit a tendency to respond to expected musical structure. Adjepong et al., (2018) expanded on Nyarko's ideas and concluded that the expressive qualities of music engender affective (emotional) response.

Amoh-Yeboah (2011) joined the discussion by saying "the music making of the African was rooted in the day to day activities of society from birth through life to death. Naming ceremonies, funeral rites, work and other social celebrations were some of the contexts for the production, performance and consumption of music. As such, wherever the African and for that matter the Ghanaian child finds him or herself,he or she plays or makes music in one way or the other. The technology of the day which has aided the emergence of radio or FM stations, information centers in almost every community in cities, towns and villages and the availability of mobile electronic gadgets such as laptops, mobile phones, iPod and tape recorders have made the average Ghanaian child of school going age gained access to all kinds of music very easily. Most students do listen to music while at home, playing, working, learning or doing school assignments. Collins (2002) added his voice to this assertion with his study which found that 50% of pupils study at home with music playing in the background. Similar research by Arnaud Cabanaca, Leonid Perlovsky, Marie-Claude Bonniot-Cabanac and Michel Cabanac (2013) confirmed that majority of students who were questioned attested to the fact that they studied with music playing in the background even though the practice is fiercely resisted by most Ghanaian parents.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The performing arts aspect (music, dance and drama) of creative arts education over the years has received little or no attention in Ghana to the extent that, most teachers in public or government schools don't see the need to teach it when it is time for creative arts. People consider it as an activity which can be learned casually in life due to the fact that traditional

and some contemporary practitioners in most cases seem not to require any formal training to be able to perform, (Adjepong & Obeng, 2018). In addition to the above, Nyarko (2016) opined that “because music is something performed or listened to in the home, the village square, at work places, the court of a chief, the night club, the cinema hall or the Church or locations for ceremonial or ritual, it is easy to overlook its intellectual and artistic dimensions and view it only as an object of functional interest, something whose sole purpose is entertainment and which can therefore, be approached largely as an extracurricular activity for children who are interested.” But these same students who are denied the learning of performing arts (music, dance and drama) are seen playing on their electronic mobile gadgets or listening to music from a nearby radio or club or drinking spot while studying. At night especially during vacations, these same students are seen in and around clubs, spots and during weekends at funeral grounds around 5:30pm to 6:30 seriously listening and dancing to popular music. The questions are, what effect, does the popular music these students play while studying have on their academic performance? Are students able to concentrate while learning with popular music playing at the background? Are the students affected positively or negatively by the presence of background popular music while learning? Do students who play or listen to popular music while studying perform or react differently to these rhythmic sounds and lyrics? Additionally, does the presence of popular music in the learning environment affect the social behavior of students?

Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper focuses on the playing and listening to popular music and its effects on the academic performance of students within the Agogo Asante Akyem District. Accordingly, does the concept of popular music affect the academic performance of students?

II. REVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

2.1 Popular music

According to Nyarko (2016), scholars have generally written on Ghanaian popular music of which some are reggae music, hip-life music and gospel musicians in America, Africa and Ghana but little or none on the impact of popular music on the academic performance of the youth in Agogo Asante Akyem.

The Webster's Unabridged dictionary of the English Language (2001), defined the word “popular” using seven different adjectives which are: common, ordinary people or people in general, of pertaining to, or representing the people, especially the common people, of the people as a whole, prevailing among the people generally, adapted to the ordinary intelligence or taste, and suited to the means of ordinary people. Accordingly, the researchers defined popular music as ‘music intended for wide audience appeal, intending to educate, inspire, encourage and embody cultural appeal’.

Agawu (2003: p.118) also citing Karin Barber writes: “African popular music, the most protean, adaptable, transferable of arts, and the only one to make a noticeable

impact on popular audience outside Africa, was one of the first popular African arts to be seriously studied; but even that was quite a recent development, after many decades in which ethnomusicologists deplored the contamination of authentic indigenous traditional sounds by the infusion of Western rhythms, melodies and technologies”.

Collins (2002) noted the ongoing generational changes in traditional recreational music making and says ‘It could be rightly claimed therefore that much of contemporary Ghanaian, and indeed African popular music, is a direct continuation of traditional generational oriented recreational music, albeit with elements from Europe, the Americas, India and the Islamic world incorporated into it’.

Arnaud Cabanaca et al., (2013) defined popular music from ethnographic approach as ‘music created, used and interpreted by different individuals and groups’. Arnaud's notion was that, the approach to popular music studies should focus on social identity and relationships, with emphasis on music as social practice and process with comparative and holistic, historical and dialogical, reflexive and policy-oriented. With the above, Arnaud was actually talking about human activity involving socialisation, identities and collective practices.

Collins (2002) joins the conversation and says “popular music is unquestionably rooted in the structures, inner processes and operational patterns of the secular human body”. The structures referred to by Middleton here include musical gestures which have to do with movement of the human body. Even listeners of this type of music often find themselves moving which brings in mind rhythm as a key element. The producer of sound can make us dance to his tune by forcing his activity upon us (Arnaud Cabanaca et al., (2013), and when we ‘find ourselves moving’ in this way, there is no more call for moral criticism of the supposedly ‘mechanical’ quality of the response than when a loudspeaker ‘feeds back’ a particular pitch. This implies that boosting the volume can force zonal crossover, as when very loud performance makes us ‘feel’ a pitch rather than hearing it in the normal way, our skin vibrates with it, as with a rhythm.

Arnaud Cabanaca et al., (2013) further posited that ‘in modern popular songs, the listeners seem to be related to the sound-box not only from an objective point of view, but through a feeling of being inserted into the mix, a process which produces gestural identification and resonance’. Nyarko (2016) also opined that ‘if by popular art one means the art of the common people, then there has always been what is called folk art. Carroll is of the view that if popular art just means art that is liked by lots of people, then it seems fair to say that every society has had some popular art’.

Adjepong et al., (2018) reiterated that popular music has been regarded with disdain as “mere entertainment”, trivial and ephemeral. This hegemony of elite culture has, however, been challenged recently, an acknowledgement of the fact that the very ordinariness of popular culture masks their importance as “well-springs of popular consciousness”.

Arnaud Cabanaca et al.,(2013) alluded to the fact that, “we are indefatigably addressed by music, though we are often barely aware of its presence. Music reaches us from the home stereo and in our cars, it is piped into banks, office buildings and supermarkets, and it sounds behind the action of films and television plays, playing subtly with our emotions and our will. We use music to work by, to jog by, to quiet the baby, for aerobic exercise, for ceremonies, and for religion”. Popular music gives us an understanding of the world, and of other people's feeling, far greater than what other forms of media have been able to do. Just as it is a medium for conveying myriad experiences, music is also the outcome of environmental experience. Musicians write their music as a consequence of their experiences,(Arnaud Cabanaca et al.,2013))

Adjepong et al.,(2018) posited that popular music is popular not because it reflects something, or authentically articulates some sort of popular taste or experience, but because it creates our understanding of what popularity is. The most misleading term in cultural theory is, indeed, 'authenticity'. What we should be examining is not how true a piece of music is to something else, but how it sets up the idea of 'truth' in the first place. He sums up by saying successful popular music is music which defines its own aesthetic standard. Popular music becomes more valuable the more independent it is of the social forces that organize the popular process in the first place, rooted in the person, the community or the sub-culture that lies behind it. Popular music is a commercial form, music produced as a commodity, for a profit, distributed through mass media as mass culture,(Adjepong et al.,2018).

Gauntlett (2008: 17) states that the field of popular music offers many icons and potential role models. Popular music today is not only the sounds on the recordings we buy, or hear on the radio or played in shops, cafes, bars and clubs, but also the carefully packaged set of images we see through television and magazines.

According to Kim (2011: 3), “popular music” means music that many people listen to; and music classified as “popular music constantly changes depending on what appeals to society. Kim further states that, popular music can refer to a specific musical genre such as reggae, raga, high-life, hip-life and dance hall music. From the above reviews on popular music,” we also mean music that is accessible to majority of people in society. Unlike classical music which historically has not been considered readily available to the general public, but just a handful of the elite in society, popular music is heard also every corner because of its frequent air time playing on commercial FM stations, TV stations, community information centers, by spinners and in various homes.

Popular music can be a powerful icon of cultural identity rather than a commodity transaction. As such, popular music may be seen as the type of music which has a wide following, produced by contemporary artistes and musicians and does not require public subsidy to survive. This means that popular

music involves a wide variety of genres; if an artiste attracts a large following and is financially viable, they would be included in this definition.

From the mid-1950's, popular music has usually been identified as the music and the musical styles that are accessible to the widest audience and is youth oriented. This means, the music that sells the most copies, draws the largest concert audiences, and is played most often on the radio.

Popular music is usually played on electronic instruments that are popular with many people. It also consists of short songs with a strong beat, simple tunes and catch lyrics that are easy to remember.

2.2 Music and Academic Performance

Arnaud Cabanaca et al.,(2013) on the effects of background music on musical task performance studies major music students and non- music major students and came to the conclusion that music major students scored higher marks while non-music subject students demonstrated different preference.

Etaugh Michal, (1975) in his study titled effects of reading comprehension of preferred music and frequency of studying to music, studied 16 male and 16 female college students by giving them reading comprehension in quiet surroundings while listening to their preferred music. The study concluded that the more frequently students reported studying to music, the less music impaired their performance.

Collins(2002) concluded that studying arithmetic under quiet, speech, music, and industrial noise conditions results significantly higher proportion correct answers for the music condition than for the industrial noise condition and the result for all the other conditions are not different from each other.

Hiller, cited in Arnaud Cabanaca et al.,(2013) used both sixth and seventh grade students to study the extent to which radio-listening affected the ability to attend to study materials. Each student was given one form of the reading section of the Stanford Achievement Test under a silent condition. Once a week for five weeks, different forms of the test were administered under radio conditions. On the sixth week, another form of the test was administered during a silent condition. The results of the study showed that no significant difference was ascribable to the presence or absence of radio programming. These authors also found that a higher percentage of male college students reported listening to music while studying than did females. The males also scored higher on reading comprehension tests while music was playing than did the females.

Nyarko (2016), studying reading comprehension among college graduates found that "performance in the presence of familiar background music is higher than in the presence of unfamiliar music".

Considering the indefatigable role music plays in our culture, and the level to which our students study with it, it is logical

to study the effects of playing or listening to popular music on academic performance. The misconception amongst some tutors and parents alike is that students do not concentrate when studying amidst popular music. These tutors and parents go to the extent of asking students listening to music during studies to stop the practice without empirically first ascertaining the impact of reading with background popular music.

III. METHODOLOGY

The population of the study comprised tertiary students resident within the Agogo Asante Akyem North district assembly, numbering about 500 with 130 chosen as the sample size using purposive sampling based on those who hitherto do music either as major or minor.

The research instrument designed concerned student's performance in music based on the most recent semesters of 2019/2020 academic year. The instruments were designed using google forms focusing on performance of students in numerical courses such as P.E, Maths, Science etc as corroborated with reading courses like English, Twi and Social Studies.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings in Table 1 showed significant positive association between popular music and students' academic performance in numerical courses such as Physical Education denoted by PE, Science and Maths whilst concurrently manifesting a weak association between music and reading courses such as Twi, Social Studies and English. The findings corroborated with Adjepong et al.,(2018) even though Nyarko (2016) dissented.

Overall, students performed high in Mathematics, displaying statistical significance of 0.047, followed by Science (0.041) and then P.E (0.032). The researchers' would have however, thought that there would be significant direct association between music and students' performance in PE but this didn't prevail.

From the above findings, it is obvious that music distract students when it comes to reading subjects unlike quantitative or numerical subjects. Educationist and major stakeholders are thus admonished to not take a generic stance against students listening to music whilst studying but should treat it base on individual course merit.

The popular musical types identified in the study included: high-life (secular and gospel/sacred) hip-life, reggae (secular and gospel/sacred), dance hall and "cool numbers". All the respondents selected at least, one of the categories as their favorite popular musical types. Each of them had hip-life music in addition to one other selected. Some students are normally seen with earpieces in their ears listening to popular music especially during preps and some tutors and parents are quick to label such students as truants without first of all

engaging in any empirical association between listening to music and academic performance.

Table 1. Statistical significance of Results

Course	PE	Science	Maths	Creative Arts	Twi	Social Studies	English
P<0.013	0.032	0.041	0.047	0.001		0.014	0.001

Source: Authors' Construct (2020)

V. CONCLUSION

The study concerned an examination of association between popular music and academic performance of resident students at Agogo Asante Akyem North.

Overall, popular music positively impacted students' performance in quantitative or numerical courses unlike reading courses.

It is obvious that music distracts students when it comes to reading subjects unlike quantitative subjects. Educationist and major stakeholders are thus admonished to not take a generic stance against students listening to music whilst studying but should treat it base on individual subject merit.

The researchers recommended that during examinations especially for Numerical Courses, popular music should be played around the examination halls to arouse students' enthusiasm though not in a noisy manner, noting that even though studying or writing exams are attention-grabbing activities which should be free from disruptions, the findings depict that we must move on from seeing music as a disrupting activity as the learner, just like the driver who must be focused listens to music to ease tension, stress so as to prolong studying hours etc.

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