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## Establishing Challenges Faced By Learners with Hearing Impairment in Learning Music Theory and Aurals, a Case of Primary and Secondary Schools Kakamega County, Kenya

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### **Abstract**

*Education for all (EFA) is a global commitment established in the year 2000. Vision 2030, government of Kenya 2001, also advocates for Education as an important pillar in development. The Government of Kenya has introduced free and compulsory competency based Education. Learners with hearing impairment (HI) however do not learn music as a subject. This study explores challenges faced in learning music by learners with hearing impairment (HI). The objective of the study is to establish the challenges faced by learners with hearing impairment while learning Music theory and aurals. Purposive, stratified and random sampling methods were used to select target respondents. 2 primary schools and 2 secondary schools all from Kakamega county were sampled for the study. In addition, Mumias Education Assessment Resource Centre (MEARC) was used to provide information on the selection and placement procedure of learners with hearing impairment. 80 students from each targeted institution were sampled for the study. In addition, 5 administrators from institutions of learners with hearing impairment were interviewed. The study employed descriptive and experimental research designs. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation schedules, and interview schedules and then presented using charts and tables. The questionnaires, observation and, interview schedules were administered to learners with HI, their teachers, and MEARC officers. Some learners were subjected to selected teaching strategies (experimental group) and other learners not subjected to those teaching strategies (control group). Validity was ensured by using respondents versed with special needs education. Instruments for study were tested through piloting with few respondents. The experimental research design targeted relevant respondents with hearing impairment. Music equipment used was tuned well to give correct pitch. Data was coded and presented using tables, figures and graphs. Collected data was subjected to content analysis in which triangulation was employed to get views from different sources. The major finding of the study is that learners with hearing impairment have a lot of potential in music and therefore can do music as a subject. The study recommends that learners with hearing impairment be provided with adequate learning materials in Music and they should be given an opportunity to study music as a subject; Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE) should introduce Music as a subject; and, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) should incorporate concerns of the HI in their syllabi. It is hoped that findings of this study will be beneficial to Curriculum developers (KICD), teachers, EARC officers, and learners with hearing impairment with regard to learning music and aurals. The study concluded that learners with HI are capable of studying music as a subject*

**Key words:** Hearing impairment (HI), Music and Aurals, music theory, Education Assessment and Resource Centre, placement, Omusiru.

### **Introduction**

Music for learners with HI has been addressed in western countries (Howe et al 2016). In the United

Kingdom the National Deaf Children's Society which deals with strengths and weaknesses of learners with HI in education matters has been established. In Australia there is established a kitty developed for teaching Music to learners with HI. Howe et, al (2016) argues that the deaf can listen to and make music of their own. Howe, however, does not state challenges in the study of Music and aural by learners with HI, hence this study. Beethoven's Nightmare, a band which entertains people in America shows the potential of the HI (Dietrich & Tutt 2008)

This scenario is consistent with learners with HI in Kenya who also perform music. These learners take part in all social entertainment functions. Dietrich & Tutt (2008) describe the inner hearing aspect of the deaf. They argue that hearing is not about the ear but the deeper feeling of vibrations. Dietrich & Tutt (2008) however does not identify challenges faced by learners with HI in learning music theory and aural. This study sought to identify challenges faced by learners with HI in learning music theory and aural. It is the hope of this study that learners with HI can be nurtured into professional musicians. Findings of this study are useful to school administrators in institutions with learners with HI to expand their curricula by including Music as a teaching subject. Findings of this study shall provide alternative approaches for responding to musical sound without necessarily using auditory means. The study will be useful to EARC officers in assessment and placement of learners with HI. Semi-autonomous educational institutions such as KICD, KNEC, and KISE can also use the results of the study to include learners with HI in the Music syllabi.

Education For All (EFA) was established as global commitment in the year 2000, (KEMI, 2014,). The policy seems to discriminate learners with HI. In what is considered to be non-formal education, learners with HI take part in practical music during the Kenya Music Festival (Ministry of Education, Kenya Music Festival Syllabus for 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). For instance, they take part in dances, poetry and instrumental classes (Classes 831, 835, 842, 1501-1535). They have special classes for poetry (sign poems); (Ministry of Education Science and Technology syllabus, 2017 page 95-98.)

Many disabled people suffer a lot of stigma (KEMI handbook, 2014). Among the Wanga, a sub-tribe of the larger Luhya community from Western Kenya; a person with hearing impairment is called *omusiru*. Literally translated, the word *omusiru* means a fool thus belittling the hearing impaired. This is the very community where a number of institutions have been sampled for this study. This negative label therefore portrays people with HI as being incapable of perceiving and deciphering, let alone learning music. Going by this standpoint, learners with HI are quickly dismissed in music activities due to their inability to hear (Musalia, 2012).

According to Aura (2012), learners with disability in Kenya face many challenges. These learners include: learners with HI, the physically challenged, the visually impaired, and the mentally challenged among others. Some of these challenges relate to teaching methodologies and biological handicaps (Dell and Donk, 2007; Segal, 1974). Others have to do with attitude.

### **Empirical literature**

Education for All (EFA), paper which was established as global commitment in the year 2000, KEMI, 2014, seems to discriminate learners with HI. This category of learners however takes part in practical music during the Kenya Music Festival (Ministry of Education, Kenya Music Festival Syllabus for 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). For instance, they take part in dances, poetry and instrumental classes (Classes 831, 835, 842, 1501-1535). They have special classes for poetry (sign poems); (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2017) page 95-98. This confirms the potential the HI learners have in learning music and aural as a formal subject.

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The situation in Kenya is different. For many years, learners with HI have been segregated in matters of Music (Amanya, 2011). The Government of Kenya has, in response to this, put up a special institution, the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE). This institution trains teachers and assists in developing teaching and learning materials for Special Needs Learners. Adequate training in handling Music subject has not been undertaken in this institute given the scenario of Music Education and the HI schools. The subject has not been introduced to learners with HI in all special schools.

Kenya Music Festival Syllabus (2015) introduced a class on verse speaking using sign language. This was to give the learners with HI an opportunity to communicate musically. This was done with the view that their major challenge is musical hearing.

Amanya (2011), in her paper during the National Adjudicators and Trainers Workshop, admits that the learners with HI are challenged in their perception of melody and harmony. Amanya (ibid) further suggests that the main focus during the training of music to these learners should be rhythm. The view leaves out the component of melody. The content scope of the current study included melody.

Obiakor's (2007) recommendation of the use of sign language was experienced in the field where most institutions of learners with HI used sign singing in music activities. Amanya cautions Music adjudicators from expecting uniformity in dances performed by learners with HI. Amanya holds the view that learners with HI respond to rhythm more easily than melody. This view however contradicts the scenario where these learners are given pre-recorded music to direct them when performing western dances. The recorded music has melodies (See fig 2.1 and fig 2.3 in this document). This study included melody in its content scope.

Aura (2002) recommends the approach of sign singing. This addresses the challenge of the HI in melodic perception. This study provided learners with HI the opportunity to experience alternative methods to sound perception with the view to confirming their capability to study Music as a subject.

Gargiulo (2006) gives categories of the HI. The categories are: Hard of Hearing (HOH), Totally Hearing Impaired (THI), and the Partially Hearing (PH). This categorization is used in Kenya but these learners study together regardless of these categories. This categorization on learners with HI is consistent with the situation in Kenya. The researcher realized that the HOH were directing the THI during music performances.

Learners with HI are categorized as the HOH, THI, and HI. The HOH learners used support equipment to hear while the THI used hand signs only. The study presented all these categories with an opportunity to take part in aural tests. The scores from the aural tests were added and mean scores calculated to assess the performance of various categories of learners with HI in aural tests. All learners with HI were also subjected to music practicals.

Gargiulo (ibid) advocates for assessment of these learners in order to come up with the correct methods of handling them in class. This assessment should not lean towards the verbal method. The learner should be assessed in terms of socialization, co-operation, and reception of hand/meaning communication; and by the use of proper gadgets. Gargiulo goes ahead to recommend hand sign communication in teaching. This method only spells out the alphabet. It does not cover the musical sound (tone), perception challenge. The study gave the opportunity to learners to use alternative sound perception system to learn music and aural. The socialization and the cooperation aspect as advocated by Gargiulo were also used in this study as the HI performed the experiments.

## Methodology

The study employed cross-sectional descriptive and quasi experimental research designs. Descriptive design is a research design concerned with describing the state of affairs as they exist, (Kombo & Tromp, 2006.,

Mugenda & Mugenda 2003). Quasi experimental research design on the other hand is an empirical interventional study design on target population without random assignment (Serem, Boit and Wanyama, 2013). In such experiments the researcher has the freedom to control treatment of variables. This design was chosen to give a trial to various categories of learners with HI. The learners were subjected to aural tests and practical work of playing instruments and dancing. Observation schedules were used to record the performance in alternative sound perception. The scores were recorded and analyzed.

### Data collection and presentation

The researcher collected all the data from the learners with HI, their teachers and EARC officers. The first day, a Tuesday, was spent with the EARC officers, whose facility is in the serene environment of Ekama, within the Mumias Triangle, neighboring the Kakamega-Bungoma Road and Mumias Cultural Centre. The researcher was lucky to be accorded the undivided attention of the EARC officers since most of the clients come in on Mondays, one of the officers stated. Occasionally, a client who had failed to honor an appointment on Monday would disrupt the session.

The next two days were spent collecting data at St. Angela's Vocational School for the Deaf Girls, which is located at the Mumias Mission area, behind the mortuary belonging to St. Mary's Hospital, a Catholic sponsored hospital which is the biggest facility between Mumias and Bungoma, and understandably attracts many clients. The teachers took time to prepare the participating students; and the researcher was taught some basic sign language in order to facilitate the smooth execution of the exercise. The administration provided a regular teacher for support. Thursday was particularly hectic with a huge amount of interference from noise caused by funeral hearses picking bodies from the mortuary. The researcher proceeded to collect views as is shown in the following sections. After the learners had completed aural tests, the researcher collected and marked the scripts. The results are indicated below.

### Performance in Aural Tests by the Learners with HI by Class

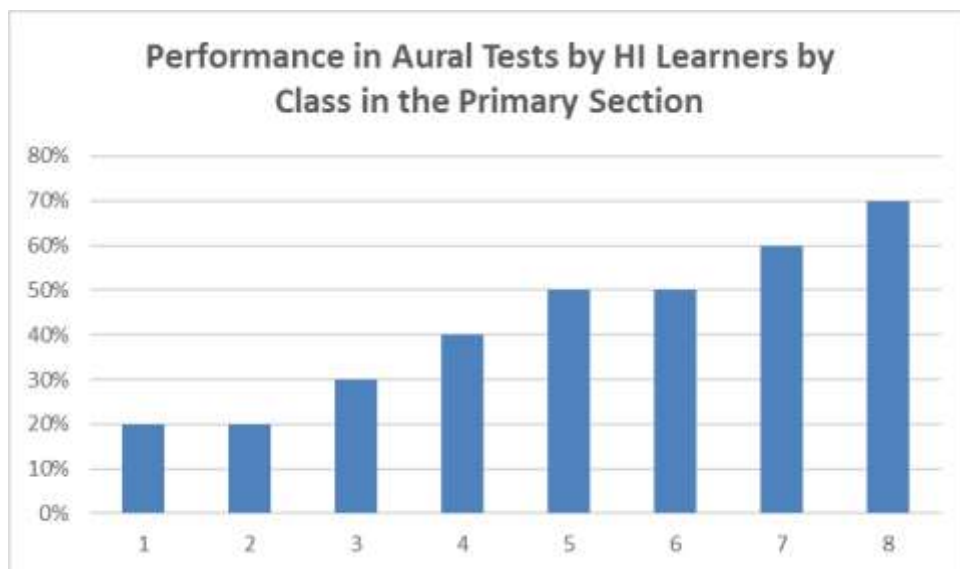
Aural tests were administered on learners with HI based on their classes, both in the primary and secondary sections. This was to test alternative sound perception in each class, 10 learners were randomly selected and tested in a separate room from their classes. The testing was conducted in the morning for the learners in the primary section since it involved more classes, and in the afternoon for learners in the secondary section. Demonstration of the tests was done at clear visible site. Learners with HI were to use sight more effective due to less of hearing.

**Table 4.5: Performance in Aural Tests by Learners with HI by Class in the Primary Section**

Class	Entry	Max. score	Actual score
1	10	100%	20%
2	10	100%	20%
3	10	100%	30%
4	10	100%	40%
5	10	100%	50%
6	10	100%	50%
7	10	100%	60%
8	10	100%	70%

*Source: Research data, 2018*

From Standard One to Three (lower primary), the average score was 23.3%. The middle level i.e. Standard Four to Six had an average score of 46.6%. The upper classes (Standard Seven and Eight) had an average score of 65%.



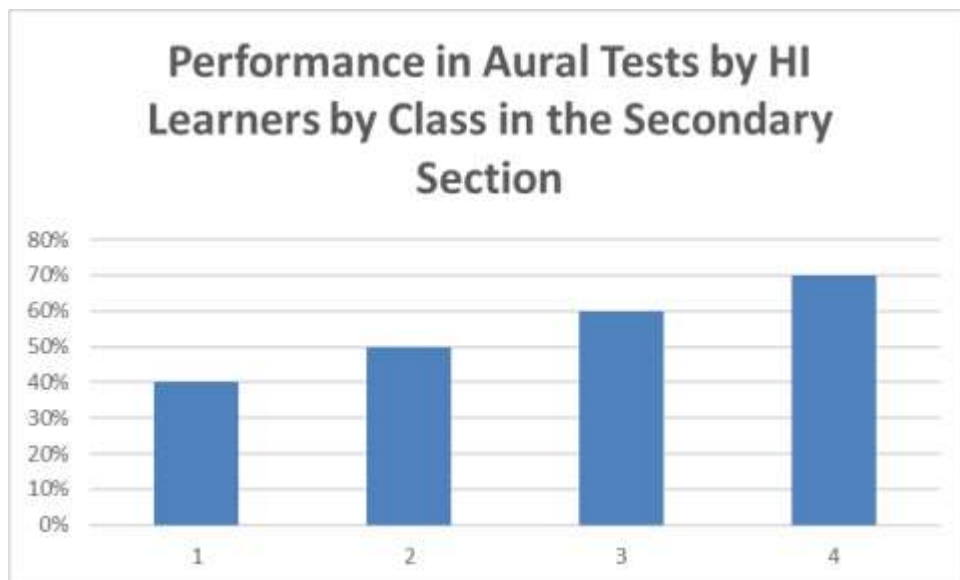
**Chart 4.5: Performance in Aural Tests by Learners with HI by Class in the Primary Section**

**Table 4.6: Performance in Aural Tests by Learners with HI by Class in the Secondary Section**

Form	Entry	Max. score	Actual score
1	10	100%	40%
2	10	100%	50%
3	10	100%	60%
4	10	100%	70%

Source: Research data, 2018

The average score for the junior secondary (Form One and Two) is 45% whereas the average score for the senior secondary (Form Three and Four) is 65%.



**Chart 4.6: Performance in Aural Tests by Learners with HI by Class in the Secondary Section**

**Research findings and Recommendations**

The study investigated challenges faced by learners with HI in learning Music theory and aural. Data from the field revealed that learners with HI do not have adequate learning materials to support them in learning

Music and aural. The few music instruments found in these institutions were used for music festivals and not in the teaching of music. Most institutions participated in KMF and none taught music as a subject. Inadequate training and exposure posed a big challenge to the learners to study music as a subject.

Responses from questionnaires administered to the teachers of HI and their administrators indicated that there is a negative attitude to the learners with HI being given the opportunity to study Music as a subject. This is a result of their hearing handicap and music is closely associated with hearing. Music as a subject was linked to hearing and was therefore not being offered to the learners with HI. Learners with HI performed so well in dance, sign singing and recitals of poems. Their sense of sight is quite effective.

All the institutions visited used the KICD syllabus which offered the regular schools subjects. Kiswahili was replaced by sign language. The syllabus did not put into consideration the HI handicap of hearing which hindered them from taking Music as a subject. This syllabus was an impediment to the HI taking music as a subject.

The institutions offered their candidates for KNEC examination. In science, the HI were given alternative questions for the topic of sound but for the rest of subjects, the learners with HI did the same questions with the regular learners. In all these institutions, learners with HI did not do music, aural and Kiswahili.

In view of the above, the study suggested that if music examination procedure can take into account the aspect of sound, the HI can also be given an opportunity to take the subject. The study also recommends that alternative examination which uses sight rather than sound be given to learners with HI. Sign singing technique as evidenced in catholic mass at St. Angela Vocational Secondary School for the deaf (celebration mass 2019) can be used instead of sight singing. The study concludes by recommending that learners with HI can study music and aural and therefore should be given that opportunity.

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