



The Impact of Parental Influence on Students' Music Subject Selection at A-level in Ugandan Secondary Schools

Aloysius Ssekimpi

Makerere University, Uganda

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of parental influence on students' selection of music as a subject in Ugandan A-Level secondary schools, amid declining enrolment in the music subject field. This research paper aims to understand how parental perceptions and attitudes toward music influence students' subject choices, focusing on concerns over career viability and societal views on music subjects. A descriptive survey design was employed, involving questionnaires and interviews with 211 participants, including at A-level former music students (*those who offered music at O-level and did not continue with it at A-level*), their parents, school administrators, and music teachers. Stratified random sampling and purposive techniques were used to select respondents from secondary schools in central Uganda, with data collected through structured questionnaires and a Likert scale. Results indicate that parental discouragement significantly deters students from choosing music as a subject at A-level due to perceived limitations in career prospects and cultural attitudes, aligning with societal preferences for traditionally prestigious subjects. Limited generalizability outside of Ugandan A-level contexts may restrict the broader application of findings. Enhanced parental awareness and school-based counseling are recommended to promote music subject as a viable and valuable field.

Introduction

There has been a serious concern among experts and leaders that in the future, Ugandan A-level secondary schools might experience an inadequate number of students who choose music as a subject. The low uptake of A-level music education subjects is a cause for concern (Lamont & Maton, 2008), as music education forms a vital part of any education system that seeks to bring forth well-rounded graduates equipped with the relevant skills to enable them to take on the challenges of the modern workplace (Kigozi, 2014). With rising global demand for music services, students with a music background are well-positioned to succeed in an expanding industry.

The decline in the number of students taking music as a subject at A-level is often linked to parental influence and misconceptions about the career prospects within the music industry (Creech, Saunders, & Welch, 2016). Many students and parents alike are unaware of the diverse career paths in music beyond performance, such as sound engineering, music therapy, and production. This leads to an assumption that music offers limited professional opportunities (Hallam, 2010).



Okeke (2000) argues that parents and guardians substantially influence their children's career and subject choices and that parents' qualities play a crucial role in students' technical topic choices. Some parents and guardians make decisions for their children on the courses or subjects they want to pursue both at secondary school and at the college level. Research indicates that parental decisions significantly shape students' subject choices at secondary and tertiary levels. Studies suggest that low engagement in music education could be addressed by promoting awareness among parents and students about the broad opportunities in the music sector and by implementing findings from educational research to encourage student interest (McPherson & O'Neill, 2010). In many cases, parents and guardians' perceptions of music as a less profitable or prestigious path impact their children's subject selection, especially when music is perceived solely as performance rather than a multifaceted field (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Parental involvement plays a significant role in student's academic and extracurricular choices in Ugandan secondary schools. Mabunda (2002) argued that parents have a more substantial influence on their children's growth and future profession choices when it comes to career counselling. Studies have highlighted the positive correlations between parental engagement and students' academic success, which extend to their decisions regarding subject selection, including music (Besigomwe, 2018; Abrahams, Jano, & Van Lill, 2015; Alfred, Kiggundu, Musa, & Wamaungu, 2023).

Research indicates that parental influence, socioeconomic factors, and school environment significantly impact senior secondary students' career choices. A study involving senior three and senior five students across ten secondary schools in the Kabale district demonstrated that students' perceptions of their family's socioeconomic status were heavily influenced by their parents' monthly income, which in turn affected their subject choices (Besigomwe, 2018). This suggests that parents' economic conditions and involvement in their children's education are critical in shaping students' academic pathways, including selecting music as a subject.

The influence of parents/guardians on subject selection and profession choice for their children has been shown to negatively impact most students' choice of music subjects in A-level Ugandan secondary schools, forcing them to select subjects that are considered more lucrative. This pressure has led to a decline in students' academic performance, as they have steered away from subjects like music in favour of those considered more lucrative, a trend similarly observed in other findings (Sheng, 2015).

Usually, Socioeconomic status (SES) shapes parental attitudes towards music education, subsequently impacting students' decisions to pursue music at the A Level in Ugandan secondary schools. Families with higher SES often support music education more, providing their children with the necessary resources and encouragement to pursue music. Conversely, lower SES families may lack the resources and prioritise other subjects they perceive as more economically beneficial, leading to less support for music education. This dynamic can significantly influence students' decisions to take up music at the A-Level, as parental support and attitudes play a crucial role in shaping their academic and career choices (Michael & Kyriakides, 2023).

Further research in Tororo District, Eastern Uganda, examined the relationship between parental involvement, student engagement, and academic performance among secondary school students. The study found that higher levels of parental involvement were associated with better academic performance and increased student engagement (Hasahya-Mulongu, 2018). This reinforces the idea that parental support and encouragement are essential for students when making critical academic



decisions, such as selecting A-level subjects.

The influence of parents on subject selection is not limited to economic and academic support but also includes their attitudes towards certain subjects. In Uganda, music education is often seen through the lens of its cultural significance and potential for social inclusion (Tetty, 2019 & Kigozi, 2014). Parents' perceptions of music as a viable academic subject can significantly impact whether students choose to pursue it at an advanced level. While some parents may view music education as less important than other subjects, others recognise its value in providing a well-rounded education and enhancing students' cultural and social experiences (Isabirye, 2021).

Research indicates that parental decisions significantly shape students' subject choices at secondary and tertiary levels. Studies suggest that low engagement in music education could be addressed by promoting awareness among parents and students about the broad opportunities in the music sector and by implementing findings from educational research to encourage student interest (McPherson & O'Neill, 2010). In many cases, parents' and guardians' perceptions of music as a less profitable or prestigious path impact their children's subject selection, especially when music is perceived solely as performance rather than a multifaceted field (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Expectancy-Value Theory as the theoretical foundation for examining the impact of parental influence on students' music subject selection at A-level in Ugandan secondary schools. Developed by Eccles and her colleagues, the Expectancy-Value Theory posits that individuals' academic and career-related choices are motivated by two primary factors: expectations for success and subjective task value in particular domains (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2001). In this study, the theory provides a lens for understanding how parental attitudes and expectations shape students' decisions to pursue or avoid music as an academic subject.

The theory further asserts that students' expectations and values are shaped by both personal characteristics and environmental influences, particularly parental influence (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Parental beliefs, behaviours, and expectations shape students' perceptions of various academic subjects. In Ugandan A-level education, parents often influence students' choices based on cultural perceptions, career expectations, and economic considerations (Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, & Clift, 2013; Kigozi, 2014).

Thus, Parental attitudes can enhance or diminish the task value of music as a subject. Parents who view music as a viable and valuable career path may positively influence students' intrinsic and utility values for music, increasing the likelihood that students will consider it essential and beneficial. Conversely, parents discouraging music due to perceived limited career prospects may reduce students' utility value, leading them to choose other subjects deemed more practical or lucrative (Johnson & Descartes, 2017). Specifically, the framework suggests that:

- Parental Encouragement → Higher Expectations for Success in Music → Increased Likelihood of Music Selection
- Positive Parental Attitudes Toward Music → Higher Task Value (Intrinsic, Utility, Attainment) → Increased Likelihood of Music Selection
- Parental Discouragement or Preference for Other Subjects → Increased Cost Perception → Decreased Likelihood of Music Selection



Literature Review

Eccles and Harold (1993) studied the influence of parent-school involvement during early adolescence, emphasising how parents' engagement with school activities impacts children's academic and extracurricular decisions. The researchers found that when parents demonstrate a strong interest in certain subjects or areas, children are more likely to pursue those interests, especially if they perceive parental involvement as supportive rather than controlling. The study also observed that adolescents are more inclined to select subjects aligned with their parent's values and expectations, mainly when parents actively communicate the importance of those subjects and provide consistent encouragement.

If parents view music as a non-traditional or less prestigious subject, students may feel discouraged, despite personal interest or talent. Conversely, students whose parents value or participate in musical activities may feel more supported and confident in their decision to study music.

Borchert in Alphonse (2016) found that numerous parental characteristics influenced children's subject selection in secondary school in Parents' influence on subject selections. Environmental influences, opportunity factors, and personality variables are among them. Ebong (2015) discovered that a student's familial background significantly impacts their course choice. Parental expectations, parent level of education, parent socioeconomic position, parental occupation, and parent-child interaction are some of the parental characteristics that influence children's topic selection in secondary schools, according to Wachira (2018).

Ekong (2013) conducted a study examining the effect of parental musical interest and academic background on children's likelihood of choosing music as a course of study in secondary schools in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The research aimed to determine whether a parent's interest in music or their educational background significantly influenced their child's interest in pursuing music academically. Two research questions and hypotheses guided the study, which adopted an ex post facto research design. A sample of 390 Basic 9 (equivalent to Ugandan Senior 3) music students from 12 secondary schools was selected using simple random sampling. Data were gathered via a researcher-developed instrument, the Parental Musical Interest Background and Children's Musical Interest Questionnaire (PMIBCMIQ), with a reliability index of 0.84.

The results showed a significant positive relationship between parents' musical interests and their children's inclination toward music studies. Children whose parents were highly interested in music were more likely to exhibit a strong interest in music studies themselves. Their research indicated the importance of parental encouragement in developing students' musical interests, suggesting that parents' attitudes towards music can have a meaningful impact on students' academic and career choices within the field.

Dell et al. (2014) examined the impact of parental involvement and the musical home environment on school music success among students in grades 4-12 across the U.S. They explored the roles of various factors, including family background and parenting style, and how these influence students' attitudes and performance in music. Using a survey of 1,114 students, they analysed data from six U.S. regions covering diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Results indicated that musical home structure, family musical participation, and parental expectations about music study were directly linked to students' musical and academic outcomes. Contrary to previous studies emphasising home environment's broad academic impact, Dell et al. found that music-specific parental involvement had a more substantial effect on music outcomes.



Materials and Methods

Study Area

This study was conducted in selected A-level secondary schools in Uganda. These schools were chosen to provide a diverse representation to understand the parental influence on music subject selection across different socio-economic backgrounds. They were selected because, according to the UNEB records, they register the highest number of candidates at the O level in music. At the same time, they are among the schools with the least number of students who continue with music at A-level. The study covered schools from districts such as Kampala and Wakiso in central Uganda.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design. According to Doyle (2004), descriptive research involves collecting data from individuals using structured questions to gather insights about a population. Surveys are a valuable tool for examining trends, behaviours, and opinions, providing a snapshot of current affairs (Kothari, 2004). The descriptive survey design was chosen to assess the impact of parental influence on students' decisions to select music as a subject at the A-Level, focusing on both students' and parents' perceptions and experiences regarding music education.

Target Population

A population is a complete set of individuals, cases, events, or objects with shared characteristics (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). This study's target population comprised school administrators, music teachers, parents, and A-level students from selected Ugandan schools who offered music at O Level but didn't continue with it in A-level study. The population was selected to include a variety of school types, including national and private schools, to capture diverse perspectives on the influence of parental decisions on subject selection.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size was determined to include participants from various school types. As shown in Table 1, the study sampled 65 parents, 11 school administrators, 05 music teachers, and 130 students from the three schools. The total sample size was 211 respondents.

Table 1: Target Population Statistics

Category of Participants	School A	School B	School C	TOTAL
Parents	20	25	20	65
School Administrators	4	4	3	11
Music Teachers	2	2	1	5
Former Music Students	40	60	30	130
TOTAL	66	91	54	211

Source: Researcher's Field Data (2024)

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Stratified random sampling was adopted for this study since the four categories of respondents (parents, school administrators, music teachers, and students) selected from the three schools were relatively heterogeneous. These four categories of respondents represent four distinct strata. Within each stratum, the respondents were required to be homogeneous. In addition, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were employed to select respondents from each stratum. Stratified random sampling helps reduce sampling error compared to simple random sampling alone (Ndunda, Ngahu & Wanyoike, 2015), which justifies its application in this study.



Simple random sampling was used to select the students and parents being interviewed. In contrast, the school administrators and music teachers were purposively selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives. The study applied the Fisher formula to determine a representative sample size (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), as shown in Equation 1.

$$n = Z^2pq/\lambda^2 \dots \dots \dots \text{equation 1}$$

Where:

n = the desired sample size

Z = the standard normal deviation at the required confidence level (normally set at 1.96)

p = the proportion in the target population estimated to have the characteristics being studied (50% used in this study)

q = the proportion in the target population estimated not to have the characteristics being studied

λ = the margin of error or level of precision, expressed as a decimal (5% or 0.05 in this case)

By substituting the variables into the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= 1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 / 0.05^2 \\ &= 3.84 \times 0.25 / 0.0025 \\ &= 0.9604 / 0.0025 \\ &= 384 \end{aligned}$$

Since the target population is less than 10,000, a modified Fisher model was used to estimate the minimum sample size required (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999), as shown in Equation 2:

$$n_f = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n-1}{N}}$$

Where:

n_f = the desired sample size when the target population is less than 10,000

n = the desired sample size when the target population is more than 10,000

N = the population size

By substituting into Equation 2:

$$\begin{aligned} n_f &= \frac{384}{1 + \frac{384-1}{211}} = \frac{384}{1 + 1.818} = \frac{384}{2.818} \\ &= 136 \end{aligned}$$

Thus, 136 students were required for this study. When combined with 65 parents, 11 school administrators, and five music teachers, the total sample size was 211 respondents.

Data Collection Procedures



The study employed non-probability sampling techniques to select respondents deliberately. Respondents were chosen based on their relevance to the study's objectives, particularly focusing on students, parents, music teachers, and school administrators across the three selected schools. The schools were randomly selected by writing their names on separate pieces of paper, which were then folded, placed in a container, shaken, and handpicked one by one to determine the participating schools. This ensured a representative selection of schools from which to draw respondents.

Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaires with open-ended and closed-ended questions were developed, along with interview schedules for parents, school administrators, and music teachers. A five-point Likert scale, designed to capture all variables under investigation, was administered to the respondents to collect primary data. Secondary data was obtained from published reports, academic journals, and other relevant documents. The data collected focused on factors such as parental influence, student attitudes toward music, and demographic details.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The Content Validity Index (CVI) was used to assess the validity of the research instruments. According to Kothari (2004), CVI measures the relevancy of items in the questionnaire, evaluating clarity and meaningfulness in line with the study's objectives.

The formula for CVI is:

$$\text{CVI} = \frac{\text{relevant items}}{\text{total number of items}}$$

A threshold of 0.7 was used as the minimum acceptable CVI score, below which the research instrument would be considered invalid. For this study, the CVI was calculated to be 0.87, confirming the validity of the research instrument. Validity was further tested through expert reviews, feedback from faculty supervisors, and peer evaluation.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

Reliability, as defined by Kothari (2004), refers to the consistency of research instruments in producing similar results after multiple trials. Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) argue that a research instrument is reliable if it consistently yields the expected results. The instrument was pre-tested using the test-retest method, with responses scored in two rounds. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was calculated at a 95% confidence level to assess the similarity between the first and second scores. A coefficient factor of 0.7 was set as the threshold for reliability, below which the instrument would be considered unreliable. In this study, the reliability coefficient was deemed acceptable.

Data Types and Sources

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained directly from the respondents, including demographic information, student perceptions of the value of music as a subject, and parental influence on subject choice. Other factors, such as gender attitudes, the role of teachers, family expectations, and the learning environment, were also explored. Secondary data sources included published reports, journals, and relevant documents on the subject matter. These sources provided additional context and support for analysing the primary data.

Results and Discussion



This section presents findings on the impact of parental influence on student’s choice to study music at A-level in Uganda’s Senior Secondary Schools.

Demographic Information

The demographic data collected in this study covered gender, age, and school type. These details were crucial in understanding the factors influencing students' choices in selecting music as a subject at the A-Level in Ugandan secondary schools.

Respondent’s Gender

Of the returned questionnaires from A-level students, school administrators, music teachers and parents, 118 were completed by males, representing 55.9% of the respondents. In comparison, 93 (44.1%) were completed by females, as shown in Figure 1. This gender distribution provides a balanced perspective on how male and female respondents perceive music as a subject choice in A level.

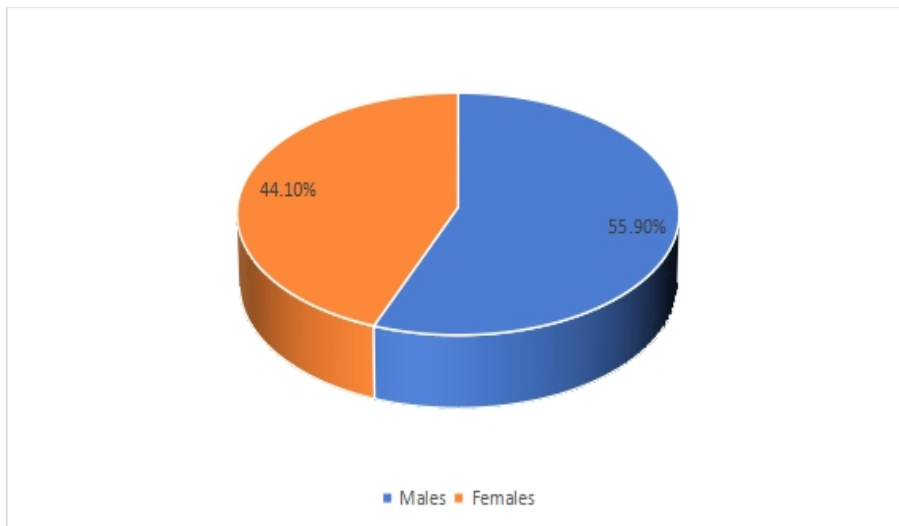


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Respondent’s Age

The age of respondents was analysed to determine if age significantly affected students’ perceptions of music as a subject. Most respondents were within the 17-19 age bracket, representing 67.8%, followed by those aged 20 and above at 29.4% and students aged 16 and below at 2.8% (Figure 2). Research suggests that early exposure to a subject can shape students' attitudes, particularly relevant for subjects perceived as unconventional, such as music (Meghir & Palme, 2005). Heckman (2006) supports the idea that an enriched educational environment can enhance students' engagement and interest in a broader range of career options, including the arts. The distribution of respondents by age is presented in Figure 2 below.

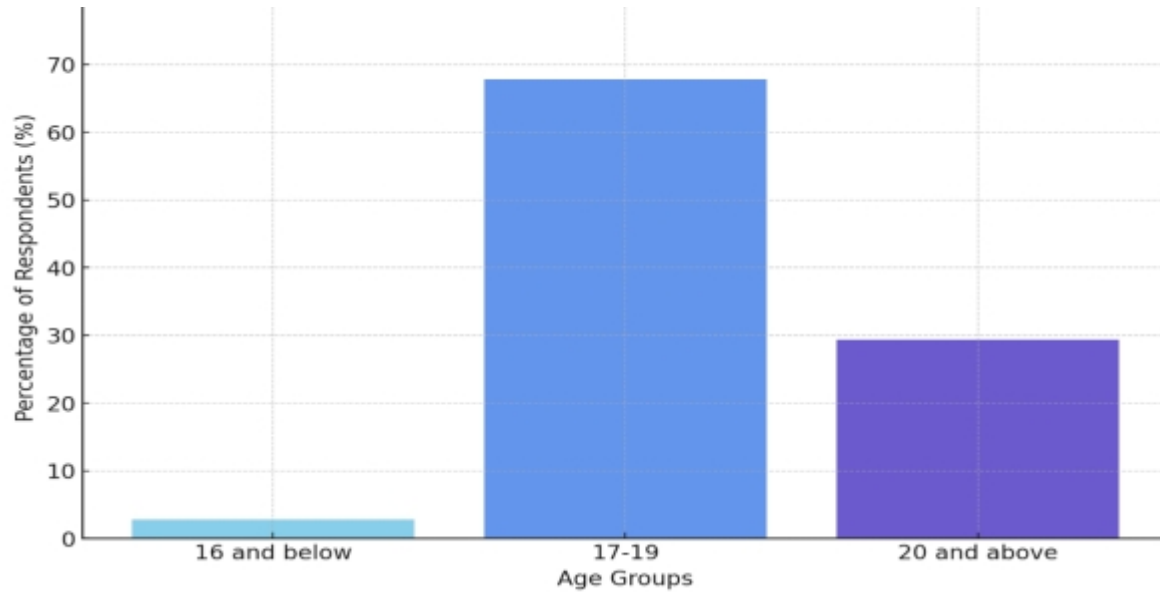


Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

School Type

This section presents the distribution of student respondents according to the type of school they attended, categorised as single-sex (girls' only) or coeducational (mixed-gender) schools. Table 2 below displays the frequency and percentage distribution of students based on their school type

Table 2: Distribution of Student Respondents by School Type

School Type	Frequency	Percent (%)
Girls' Schools	87	41.2
Coeducational Schools	124	58.8

From the table, we observe that most student respondents (58.8%) attended coeducational schools, while 41.2% were from girls' schools. This distribution provides insight into the student demographics and the school-type representation within the study, with a notable proportion of students coming from a mixed-gender environment.

Reasons for Not Choosing Music as a Subject

Respondents were asked to indicate why they chose other subjects over music. Parental influence emerged as the most significant factor deterring students from pursuing music as a subject in A 'Level Ugandan secondary schools, with 40.2% of respondents strongly agreeing and 35.3% agreeing that their parents discouraged them from studying music due to perceived limitations in career prospects and cultural attitudes. Only 8.2% disagreed, and 3.6% strongly disagreed, indicating that most students felt their parents' opinions and preferences significantly shaped their subject choice. This reinforces that parental influence is critical in subject selection, especially in non-traditional areas like music. This suggests that the respondents felt motivated by their parents to pursue subjects where they could excel. It also indicated that their parents were supportive if they had an interest in music. This corroborates findings by Muchena (2013) and Ngome (1993), suggesting that family background heavily influences students' academic decisions.



In addition to parental influence, 48.0% of students in the study agreed that alternative subjects like business studies or computer science seemed more practical or career-oriented, while 4.5% disagreed. This indicates that the presence of other subject options also contributes to students' decisions.

Resource availability was also cited, with 30.0% of students agreeing that the lack of musical instruments and learning materials discouraged them from choosing music, also 52.6% while 3.2% disagreed. Although resources play a role, they appear secondary to the influence of parental attitudes.

Other factors included the perceived difficulty of the subject and future career prospects. About 3.0% agreed that music was challenging, and 48.1% felt that career options in music were limited. Parental influence, however, remains the overriding factor, as parents often dissuade their children from studying music due to concerns over financial stability and cultural expectations, aligning with findings by researchers such as Mwiria (2005), who observed that parents in many African communities encourage subjects perceived as financially secure and respectable. Table 3 below summarises the reasons given by students for not choosing music as a subject in A-level, illustrating the varying opinions of student respondents on critical factors influencing their subject selection.

Table 3: Reasons for Not Choosing Music

Influential Factor	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
My parents discouraged me from studying music due to limited career prospects and cultural attitudes.	3.6	8.2	12.7	35.3	40.2
I believe alternative subjects like business studies or computer science are more practical or career-oriented.	5.3	4.5	4.1	38.1	48.0
Lack of musical instruments and learning materials discouraged me from choosing music.	9.4	3.2	4.8	52.6	30.0
I perceive music as a challenging subject.	37.8	44.5	2.9	11.8	3.0
Career options in music are limited.	6.9	3.4	3.4	38.2	48.1

Parental influence emerged as the most impactful factor affecting students' subject choices. Many parents discouraged their children from pursuing music due to concerns over financial stability, limited career opportunities, and societal perceptions of music as a less prestigious field. In Ugandan society, parents tend to favour subjects that lead to secure, conventional careers, such as business or sciences. This discouragement from parents creates a significant barrier for students who might otherwise have an interest in music. The strong parental sway aligns with cultural expectations, as parents often wish to guide their children toward stable professions. The findings underscore the need for greater parental awareness about the diverse opportunities within the music industry and the importance of supporting students' interests.

Furthermore, when the key informants were asked about the impact of parental influence on students' decisions not to select music at A-level, responses varied across the different categories of informants. The opinions are summarised below in Table 4 using a 5-point Likert scale.



Table 4: Agreement Among Key Informants on Parental Influence Impacting Students' Decisions Not to Select Music at A-Level

Question: Parental influence has significantly affected students' decisions not to select music at A-Level						
Respondents	No of informants	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Music students	130	2	8	5	30	55
Parents	65	3	7	5	35	50
School Administrators	11	4	9	8	18	61
Music teachers	5	2	8	7	32	51

From the data presented in Table 4, the majority of students (55%) and parents (50%) strongly agreed that parental attitudes discouraged students from selecting music, with high levels of agreement also among school administrators (61%) and music teachers (51%). This data reinforces the consensus that parental influence is a primary deterrent in students' choice of music as an academic subject (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). The theory of social learning showed that students often model their parents' attitudes and preferences, which heavily influence their academic and career.

The data revealed that a substantial majority of students perceived their parents as influential in their academic decisions, with 45.2% of respondents strongly agreeing that parental discouragement played a critical role in their choice to avoid music. This reflects a broader cultural context in Uganda where subjects traditionally viewed as more prestigious and financially stable, such as the sciences and business studies, are favoured over the arts (Johnson & Descartes, 2017; Owolabi, 2019). Consequently, students may miss out on valuable opportunities in fields like music therapy, education, and production, which have the potential to offer rewarding career paths (Creech, Hallam, Varvarigou, & Clift, 2013).

Furthermore, the study identified that while teachers can provide valuable guidance and support, their influence pales compared to that of parents. Positive reinforcement from educators regarding the diverse career opportunities in music is essential, yet it is often overshadowed by the prevailing parental narrative that emphasises stability over creativity (Wolff, 2017). The collective responses from key informants, including music students, parents, school administrators, and music teachers, corroborated this assertion, indicating a consensus on the detrimental impact of parental attitudes toward music subject selection.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role of parental influence in shaping students' subject choices, particularly in the context of music as a subject in Ugandan A-level secondary schools. The alarming trend of declining enrolment in music as a subject can be attributed mainly to parental attitudes, which often discourage students from pursuing music due to perceived limitations in career prospects and societal expectations.

Given these findings, educators and policymakers must recognise the importance of parental involvement in educational decision-making. Initiatives aimed at raising awareness among parents about the breadth of career opportunities within the music industry could be beneficial. Such programs could include workshops, informational sessions, and resources that highlight the successful career trajectories of individuals within the music field (Hallam, 2010). Additionally,



schools should enhance their career counselling services to provide comprehensive guidance that emphasises the value of music education alongside other subjects.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges posed by parental influence is critical for reversing the trend of declining music subject enrolment in Ugandan A-level secondary schools. A collaborative approach involving parents, educators, and the broader community is necessary to foster an environment that encourages students to explore their interests in music subject without fear of parental disapproval. By cultivating a supportive educational landscape, we can empower students to make informed decisions that align with their passions, ultimately enriching society's cultural and creative fabric.

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