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Impact of Educational Predictors on Music Subject Selection at A-Level in Ugandan Schools: Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources

Impact of Educational Predictors on Music Subject Selection at A-Level in Ugandan Schools: Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources

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Abstract
This paper investigates the key Educational Predictors particularly the impact of science education policy and the availability of instructional resources on A-level music subject selection in Ugandan secondary schools. Despite the potential of A-level music education to foster entrepreneurial skills and income-generating opportunities through avenues such as performance, teaching, and production, the Ugandan secondary education system's emphasis on science subjects undermines the visibility and support for music subject. This prioritization not only reduces the appeal of music as a viable academic option but also limits students' access to diverse career pathways in the arts and entertainment industries. This study used a mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach, collecting quantitative data through a 5-point Likert scale survey and qualitative insights from interviews with students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Descriptive statistics provided an overview of respondents' perspectives, while correlation and logistic regression analyses assessed the influence of key variables. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between the emphasis on science education policy and music subject selection, as shown by logistic regression ($B = -0.651$, $p < 0.001$). Conversely, access to instructional resources positively correlated with music selection ($B = 0.527$, $p < 0.001$). These results show the role of science education policy in discouraging music enrollment and shows the positive impact of resource availability on students' choices. While this study focuses on schools in Uganda's Central Region, broader research could further validate these findings. The study recommends policy adjustments to balance STEM focus with arts education, enhancing resource allocation to support diverse subject selection, including music, at the secondary level.

Introduction
The declining enrolment in music education at A-level is a critical issue that warrants attention, particularly in Uganda's secondary schools. While the government's focus on science-based education is important for national development (Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda. 2011), the marginalisation of creative subjects like music undermines the holistic development of students

(Hallam, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2009). According to reports from the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), the number of students enrolling in music at A-Level has steadily decreased since the implementation of the science policy. In contrast, enrolment in science subjects has increased (UNEB, 2019).

This paper thus seeks to investigate the influence of key educational predictors, particularly science education policy and the availability of instructional resources, on selecting music as a subject in A-level Ugandan secondary schools. Uganda's Compulsory Science Teaching Policy mandates that all lower secondary school (Ordinary level) students must study core science subjects, including chemistry, biology, physics, and mathematics. The primary goal was to address the shortage of professionals in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields by encouraging students to pursue science subjects at higher educational levels.

This move was driven by the belief that increasing the number of students trained in scientific disciplines would boost Uganda's economic growth and global competitiveness (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2006). While the policy aimed to produce more scientists and professionals in these fields, it has had significant unintended consequences (Dillon, 2009). By mandating science subjects and offering incentives including but not limited to government scholarships for science-based university courses, the education system in Uganda has inadvertently marginalised non-science subjects, particularly creative subjects like music, at A-Level, now perceived by not only students but also parents as less valuable within the Ugandan secondary school system (UNESCO, 2019). Essentially, if the government thinks that science subjects are more important, why would anybody else be interested in studying music as a subject in A- level and continue and hope that they would have a career in them? (Eccles, 2009).

Despite the potential of A-level music education to foster entrepreneurial skills and income-generating opportunities through avenues such as performance, teaching, and production, the Ugandan secondary education system's emphasis on science subjects undermines the visibility and support for music as a subject. Also, Music contributes to cognitive development, emotional expression, and cultural preservation, all of which are essential for a well-rounded education (Schellenberg, 2005; Blacking, 1995). Music education has seen a dramatic reduction in student enrolment, which has led to significant challenges in its delivery and uptake at the A-Level stage (UNESCO, 2019).

This study is justified by the need to address the imbalance created by the Compulsory Science Teaching Policy and the unequal distribution of instructional resources in Ugandan secondary schools. It addresses the following key research questions: (1) How does the government's emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects affect students' choices to pursue music as a subject at A 'level? (2) What role do instructional resources play in shaping students' decisions to select music as a subject at A 'level?

Before this policy, Uganda's education system had been dominated by arts and humanities subjects, producing a workforce primarily oriented toward white-collar jobs in public administration and education. Adopting the Compulsory Science Teaching Policy in Uganda, which was introduced in 2005 and aimed at promoting science and technology, has led to both advancements and challenges within the educational space. (Kembabazi, 2023). Despite the government's well-intentioned focus on promoting Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, there has been a notable decline in the number of students selecting music as a subject at A-Level. This has led to

students feeling pressured to continue with science combinations, often at the expense of arts subjects, with many framing it as less necessary for future careers (Robinson, 2013).

Furthermore, while the Ugandan government has made efforts to improve conditions for science teachers, including a notable salary enhancement of 300% for science teachers (Milliam & Dominic, 2022), issues such as low non-science subject teachers, which includes music teachers, a shortage of qualified music teachers, and inadequate instructional resources continue to hinder effective music education in A-level Uganda secondary schools as many views it as less important. This is witnessed by the small number of students taking music as a subject at A- level.

The unequal distribution of resources between science and arts subjects further exacerbates this trend. While the government has invested heavily in science education, providing laboratory kits, textbooks, and increased salaries for science teachers, music subjects have remained underfunded and under-resourced (Nabirye, 2018).

The qualifications and confidence of music teachers significantly influence students' decisions regarding subject selection. Many qualified teachers lack adequate training and self-assurance in delivering music education, which can deter students from opting for music as a subject at A-level (Kigozi, 2014). Non-specialist teachers often struggle to implement a robust music curriculum, leading to a reduced interest among students(Richard et al., 2023). Research indicates that a curriculum enriched with well-delivered music education is more likely to foster academic growth and engagement, highlighting the need for improved teacher training and support. (Richard et al.,2023). However, most secondary schools in Uganda still lack qualified teachers, limiting the subject selection of music to A-level. The quality of school infrastructure significantly influences students' subject selection by providing a foundation that supports their academic performance and engagement. Thus, schools equipped with quality resources and supportive learning environments are essential in cultivating students' academic success and motivation for specific subjects" (Barrett et al., 2019: 12).

Theoretical framework

This study is guided by the Systems Theory, which posits that the components of a system must work together to achieve desired outcomes. In this study, the education system is seen as a complex system composed of various elements, including policies, resources, and student preferences. These elements interact to shape outcomes such as subject selection at A-Level.

The Compulsory Science Teaching Policy and instructional resources are key components (or sub-systems) within the broader educational system that influence students' subject choices. The policy creates a bias toward music as a subject, while the inadequate distribution of resources between science and arts subjects further skews students' preferences and choices. According to Systems Theory, when one sub-system (such as science education) is disproportionately emphasised, it affects the functioning of other sub-systems (such as music subject selection), leading to imbalances in the overall system. This theoretical framework is appropriate for understanding how educational policies and resource allocation influence students' subject selection.

Review of Literature

Science education policy

The global emphasis on STEM education has had similar impacts in other countries. For instance, there has been growing concern in the United States and the United Kingdom that the overemphasis on STEM subjects has come at the expense of arts and humanities education (Robinson, 2013). Studies

have shown that while STEM education is crucial for technological advancement, the arts are essential for fostering creativity, innovation, and cultural identity. The decline in arts education enrollment has been linked to a lack of policy support and funding for arts subjects, leading students to perceive them as less valuable (National Endowment for the Arts, 2019).

In South Africa, for instance, policies emphasising the importance of STEM education have decreased enrollment in arts subjects, particularly music as a subject. Motshegwa (2015) found that the shift in government policy and funding toward STEM subjects in South African schools led to a reduction in resources for music education, which, in turn, led to fewer students selecting music as a subject.

While the science policy has successfully increased the number of students pursuing science subjects, it has also led to the marginalisation of arts subjects like music (Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda. (2021). This trend is consistent with findings from other countries, where policies emphasising STEM education have reduced interest in the arts (Robinson, 2013). "Policymakers should consider the implications of disproportionately funding certain subjects, as this may hinder a well-rounded education that values creativity and cultural education alongside scientific advancement (Rukundo & Bashaija, 2022).

Eisner (2001) argues that when curricula prioritise science and technology, the arts may become secondary, limiting students' engagement with music subject. International studies confirm this trend, showing a direct correlation between policy shifts towards STEM and a decrease in music subject selection (Hallam, 2010; Winner & Cooper, 2000). In Sub-Saharan Africa, governments often prioritise STEM fields, leading to reduced investment in arts education (Asunda & Mativo, 2016). In Sub-Saharan Africa, governments often prioritise STEM fields, leading to reduced investment in arts education (Asunda & Mativo, 2016).

Instructional resources

On the other hand, resource allocation also plays an important role in determining which subject students are likely to select. In Uganda, the government has heavily invested in science education, providing laboratory kits and textbooks and even increasing salaries (300%) for science teachers. (Namatende & Longman, 2013).

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2020), this investment has been instrumental in improving the country's science education quality. Still, it has also created disparities in how resources are distributed between science and arts subjects. Research also shows that teachers are instrumental in promoting music as a subject through motivational and inclusive teaching methods (Volk, 2002). In addition, Volk (2002) continues to argue that teachers who actively include diverse musical examples and connect with students' cultural backgrounds tend to stimulate greater student interest (Volk, 2002). Thus, limited educational resources, and the scarcity of equipment, materials, and instructional support hinders effective music education. According to Campbell (2005), resource challenges lead teachers to shy away from culturally diverse music, impacting students' exposure and subsequent interest in the subject, which might affect their choice of music subject selection at the A- level.

In contrast, arts subjects, including music, often lack the necessary resources to thrive. Schools frequently do not have the musical instruments, textbooks, or trained teachers required to teach music effectively, making it a less attractive option for students (Nabirye, 2018). The lack of resources for music education has been cited as a significant factor in students' decisions not to pursue the subject

at A-Level (Okumu, 2017). Without the necessary facilities, students are less likely to develop an interest in music, and schools are less able to offer music as a viable subject (Uganda Ministry of Education, 202)

Furthermore, research shows that schools with limited access to musical instruments, practice spaces, and trained teachers struggle to attract students to music programs (Kisitu & Nsimbe, 2018). In Uganda, music education lacks sufficient funding, exacerbating its exclusion from core academic subjects (Nabirye, 2018). This resource gap contributes significantly to students' declining interest in music.

Research also indicates that many Ugandan schools face challenges such as underfunding and inadequate staffing, leading to inconsistencies in the music curriculum across institutions. (Richard & Deus, 2023). This deficiency leaves many students with limited musical backgrounds,diminishing their confidence and interest in music as an academic pursuit. (Kigozi, 2014). As highlighted by experts in the field, the foundational gaps in music education significantlyhinder students' perceptions of music as a legitimate and viable subject choice.

Despite holding qualifications, many music teachers in Uganda often lack the necessary training and confidence to deliver effective music education, leading to diminished student interest (Kigozi, 2014). Research suggests that a well-implemented music curriculum, supported by well-prepared teachers, significantly enhances student engagement and academic growth (Richard & Deus, 2023).

Resource availability further complicates the landscape of music education, particularly in the disparity between private and government schools. Private institutions often enjoy better funding and resources, fostering more robust music departments and extracurricular opportunities that enhance students' exposure to music (Kigozi, 2014). In contrast, students in government schools frequently lack support and resources, which may discourage them from considering music as a subject option at A-Level.

Methodology

Study Design and Approach

This study used qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect and analyse data regarding the impact of educational predictors on music subject selection at the A-Level in Ugandan schools. The predominant approach was quantitative, utilising a survey questionnaire to gather data on educational predictors, analysed through descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and logistic regression. This approach was chosen to enable the collection of numerical data and provide a precise analysis of the relationships between variables (Bruce, 1994). Triangulation was applied to ensure the validity of findings, allowing for multiple perspectives to converge (Amin, 2005; Bruce, 1999).

Qualitative data were embedded in the study through open-ended questions in the survey, providing deeper insights into the reasons behind students' music subject choices. Both approaches were triangulated to enhance the robustness of the findings. The qualitative responses helped explain and contextualise the quantitative results, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing music subject selection.

Cross-sectional Survey Design

A cross-sectional survey design was employed, facilitating data collection at a single point in time from a representative sample. This method was chosen for its simplicity and cost-effectiveness (Amin,

2005). The study population consisted of A-level students and teachers from selected secondary schools in the Central Region of Uganda.

Sample Size and Selection

The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. The study targeted 211 participants, including music teachers, parents, school administrators, and students. This sample was selected through simple random sampling, and the final sample size of 211 participants (5 music teachers, 65 parents, 11 school administrators, and 130 students) achieved a satisfactory response rate of 93.3%, deemed acceptable for analysis.

Data Collection

Data was collected using self-administered questionnaires to capture information on the predictors shaping music subject selection at A-Level, including Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources. The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies that examined subject selection and educational influences (Eisner, 2001; Asunda & Mativo, 2016). It included sections on Student demographics (age, gender, school type, A-level subject combination), Subject selection influences (Availability of instructional resources for music and school science education policy.

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The content validity index (CVI) was 0.82, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Amin, 2005). Cronbach's Alpha, calculated using SPSS, was 0.76, indicating acceptable reliability (Amin,2005).

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small sample of 20 students from non-participating schools to assess clarity and validity. Modifications were made based on feedback to improve the instrument's reliability.

Semi-structured Interviews and Resource Audits

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine music students, five music teachers, ten parents, and 11 school administrators to gain deeper insights into the availability of instructional resources, science education policy and their impact on music subject selection. The interviews followed an interview guide developed based on key themes identified in previous research (Barrett, 2006; Hallam, 2010), such as the availability of musical instruments, Teacher training and qualifications, administrative support for music programs, and Challenges facing music education. The interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Resource audits were conducted to evaluate the availability of instructional materials in the schools. The audits involved inventorying musical instruments, textbooks, practice rooms, and digital resources available to students. A checklist, adapted from Kisitu & Nsimbe (2018), was used to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant resources.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. An introductory letter was obtained from Makerere University to facilitate access to schools and participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality was maintained.

This study explored how educational predictors, specifically Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources, impact the selection of music as a subject at the A-Level in Uganda's secondary schools. The findings were expected to inform policy recommendations for promoting the arts alongside the sciences in Uganda's education system.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) to summarise the characteristics of the sample and explore the level of agreement or disagreement with the statements. Pearson's correlation was employed to examine the relationships between the independent variables (Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources) and the dependent variable (Music Subject Selection).

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the predictors could explain the variance in music subject selection. The significance level was set at 0.05 for all tests. Results were presented using tables, charts, and percentages to facilitate interpretation and comparison.

Results

The items on the questionnaire were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data, providing an overview of the participants' perspectives on educational predictors. Correlation analysis was employed to establish the relationships between the variables, followed by logistic regression analysis to determine how much the independent variables impact music subject selection. This study examined the impact of educational predictors on music subject selection at A-Level in Ugandan schools. The results are presented in tables to correspond with the research objectives.

Science Education Policy and Music Subject Selection

The involvement of the Science Education Policy was assessed in terms of its influence on music subject selection. The mean response indicated a moderate level of agreement ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.75$), suggesting that participants acknowledged the importance of policy in their subject choices. A strong, significant positive correlation was found between Science Education Policy and music subject selection ($r = 0.513$, $p < 0.05$).

To determine the extent of this influence, logistic regression analysis revealed that the Science Education Policy significantly predicted the likelihood of students selecting music as a subject ($B = -0.651$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that for each unit increase in support for Science Education Policy, the odds of selecting music decreased significantly. The logistic regression results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Logistic Regression of Music Subject Selection on Educational Predictors

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Wald	Df	p	Exp(B)
(Constant)	2.154	0.451	22.348	1	0.000	8.634
Science Education Policy	-0.651	0.123	28.574	1	0.000	0.521
Instructional Resources	0.527	0.105	25.342	1	0.000	1.694

Dependent Variable: Music Subject Selection (1 = Yes, 0 = No)
Nagelkerke R^2: 0.354
χ^2: 37.859, $p < 0.05$

Source: Researcher's Field Data, 2024)

Notes:

- B: Unstandardized coefficient

- Std. Error: Standard error of the coefficient
- Wald: Wald statistic
- df: Degrees of freedom
- p: p-value
- Exp(B): Odds ratio (the exponentiated value of B)

Instructional Resources and Music Subject Selection

The influence of instructional resources on music subject selection was also analysed. The mean score for instructional resources was high ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.68$), showing that most respondents felt that the availability of resources significantly impacts their choice of music as a subject. A strong positive correlation was found ($r = 0.426$, $p < 0.05$), confirming that better access to instructional resources correlates with an increased likelihood of selecting music.

The regression analysis further indicated that instructional resources significantly influenced music subject selection ($B = 0.527$, $p < 0.001$), meaning enhanced access to resources increased the odds of students selecting music. The findings reinforce that the Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources are critical predictors in this context.

Discussion

The results of this study focus on the significant role of educational predictors—specifically Science Education Policy and Instructional Resources—in shaping A-level students' decisions to select music as a subject in Ugandan secondary schools.

Implications of Science Education Policy

This study reveals that the current Science Education Policy, which prioritises science subjects, negatively impacts students' inclination toward choosing music. A notable correlation exists between this policy and the reduction in music selection rates, suggesting a structural bias that may discourage students from pursuing music. Logistic regression analysis further confirms this, demonstrating that a more substantial alignment with the Science Education Policy significantly decreases the likelihood of students choosing music. While the policy successfully emphasises science education, it may inadvertently restrict students' academic options by undervaluing the arts.

Impact of Instructional Resources on Music Selection

The availability of instructional resources is a crucial factor influencing students' music subject choices. A strong positive correlation between resource availability and the likelihood of selecting music suggests that students are more inclined toward music studies when schools provide adequate resources, such as musical instruments, textbooks, and practice spaces. The regression analysis supports this, showing that better access to resources considerably increases students' chances of choosing music, highlighting the crucial role of material support in arts education.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not without limitations. One limitation is that it primarily focuses on students and educators in the Central Region of Uganda, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions. Additionally, the cross-sectional survey design only captures data at one point, limiting the ability to assess the long-term effects of the Science Education Policy on music subject selection.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

These findings present valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and school administrators aiming to foster a more balanced educational environment. To address the issues identified, policymakers should consider reassessing the Science Education Policy to reduce its discouraging impact on music subject selection. Encouraging interdisciplinary approaches or increasing flexibility in subject choice could create a more inclusive curriculum that values the arts alongside science.

Furthermore, enhancing school instructional resources is essential for supporting students interested in music. Investments in music-specific resources, such as instruments and dedicated practice spaces, can help close existing gaps and cultivate an environment where arts education is accessible and valued alongside scientific disciplines.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that Science Education Policy and the availability of instructional resources significantly influence A-level students' decisions to select music as a subject in Ugandan secondary schools. The data show a clear negative association between the Science Education Policy's emphasis on science subjects and students' likelihood of choosing music. Specifically, students reported feeling limited encouragement to pursue music due to the policy's focus, which suggests a potential unintended impact on their subject choices.

Moreover, the findings directly support the positive effect of instructional resources on music selection. Access to musical instruments and dedicated practice facilities correlated with an increased likelihood of students opting for music, emphasising the role that adequate resources play in advancing interest in arts education.

These results indicate that a reassessment of the Science Education Policy's broader impact on subject choice may be warranted, focusing on creating a more balanced curriculum that does not inadvertently discourage students from exploring artistic subjects. Additionally, the data support the need for targeted investments in music education resources, which could encourage more students to consider music a viable academic option.

In conclusion, this study substantiates the argument that policy direction and resource availability are instrumental in shaping students' subject choices and suggests that enhancing support for arts education may foster a more inclusive academic environment aligned with diverse student interests.

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