**GENDER INEQUALITIES IN MUSIC EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE MUSIC EDUCATORS IN KENYA**

**Abstract**

Kenyan female music educators have for decades strived for a musical space that allows for their musicing, recognition and growth in the discipline. However, given the gendered nature of the music education field, the experiences of Kenyan female music educators have been greatly influenced by gender inequalities. This paper therefore focuses on the experiences of secondary school female music educators. Specifically, this paper aims to look at their experiences in the musical spaces that include the music classroom, music educators` workshops, Kenya Music Festivals and academia. This study seeks to elucidate some of these challenges that female music educators have to deal with in the music education spaces with the aim of sparking a discourse that will create awareness amongst the various stakeholders. In addition, these experiences will serve to enlighten the newly recruited women music educators on how to navigate the music education spaces for their enhanced musical growth. The location of the study is Bungoma County. The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach and purposive sampling technique whereby the female music educators of Bungoma were purposively sampled. The data collection instruments to be used are semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the collected data employed the content- analysis method.

*Key Words; Music Education, Gender Inequalities, Female music educators, Musicing, Music Education Spaces, Kenya Music Festivals*

**Gendered experiences in Music Education**

Gender inequalities permeate and are experienced in various spaces within the music education field including the music classroom and musicing platforms. With each interaction between the male and female in the music education field, gender disparities often persist. These gender disparities have been manifested through the difference in choice of instruments, teaching and learning activities and music positions in the field (Roulston and Misawa, 2011; Green, 2002; Lamb et al., 2002; Morton, 1994).These practices can be attributed to different factors. First and Foremost, Roulston and Misawa (2011) relate the gender differences to the need by both female and male musicers to affirm their gender. Having the societal expectations that confine the male and female to specific musical activities results to the differences observed both in learners and music educators. In the same line, Green (2002) confirms this as she notes that the choice of instruments and musical activities are influenced by their ability to effectively affirm the conventional constructions of femininity and masculinity. Not only were girls seen to dominate in singing activities, but were also regarded as shy and unwilling to adventure with a variety of musical instruments as opposed to their male counterparts. From her study, Green confirms that the basic notions of femininity mould female musicers into what can be perceived as being “musically cautious.” This implies that the male and female musicers choose a musical activity that is perceived by the wider society as gender appropriate .Although Roulston and Misawa`s work focuses on these gender differences as experienced by music learners through the eyes of elementary music educators, the current study intends to focus on the experiences of the Kenyan female music educators as they journey through the gender differences in musical activities. On the other hand, Green`s study deviates from the current study contextually besides the fact that it focuses on music students while this study focuses on secondary school female music educators. However, the influence of societal constructions of gender to female music educators influences this study as it attempts to attach meaning to the experiences of the female music educators.

In regard to teacher training, Lamb, Dollof & Howe (2002) argue that women had different experiences from men. In fact they suggest that the gendering of music education began long ago as women were trained privately while their male counterparts received formal training in teacher training institutions and conservatories. In this, they suggest that the musical training of women has always been scarce as compared to the male. A situation of gender bias in music leadership roles is also portrayed as they observe that indirect proportions exist between female symphony performers and female conductors.It is observed that women have limited opportunities in regard to conducting even though they are increasingly becoming successful as performers in symphony orchestras.

In Kenya, the gendering of music education in could have drawn its influence from the Traditional African society. As stated by Nketia (1992), the professional musicians in the Traditional African society were majorly men who passed their skills informally to the sons of the players hence musical skills were confined to male. As stated, the musical role played by the female majorly involved singing to their young ones. It is clear that these historical gender disparities have largely informed gender stereotypes present in the music education field to date. For example, the male music educators still dominate the music education field in Kenya both in terms of their numbers and musicing activities. The female music educator in this case faces challenges in their navigation of the field. This study therefore examines the experiences of female music educators with the aim of not only illuminating these challenges but also showing how they navigate these limited spaces as a form of agency.

**Music Education Spaces in Kenya**

These are the areas in which the learning, teaching and participation in musical activities takes place. They comprise of the Music classroom, Kenya Music Festivals and teachers workshops and seminars. In the music classroom, the music educator has the platform to interact with learners as they teach. They are also under the influence of their various school managements as they carry out their duties in school. The Kenya Music Festivals is held every year during the second term of the school calendar. It presents to the learners and music educators a stage whereby musicing can take place. Having been founded by British musicians in 1927, the KMF exist to date as a parastatal body under the Ministry of Education (Odwar, 2005). Lastly, music educators workshops are normally held for the purpose of interactions and sharing of musical knowledge. An example being the Kenya Music Teachers Board, teachers convene annually to discuss various issues pertaining teaching and performance of the music students. It is here that the Kenyan music educator gains more knowledge that improves their pedagogical.

**Theoretical Perspective**

Since this study is concerned with understanding how gendered experiences affect music practices in the Kenyan music education spaces, it is guided by two theories; Michel Foucault`s theory of power and Judith Butler`s theory of gender performance. The theories of power focus on power negotiations within the Kenyan musical spaces. Three concepts drawn from Foucault`s theories influence this work; knowledge, power relations and discipline. On the other hand, Butler`s theory of gender performance analyzes gendered experiences and norms existent within the music education spaces.

**Foucauldian theories of Power**

Michel Foucault`s theories of power sheds light on the existence of two groups of people. These include the dominant and the subversive. He acknowledges that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, understanding and truths. Foucault states that knowledge is not a natural faculty but a series of struggles and a weapon in the universal war of domination and submission. From knowledge emanates the power relations which encompass dominance on the subversives. In this case then, knowledge is a form of power which facilitates dominance. This form of power can be experienced through discourses that are largely informed by societal norms. It is imperative to note that musical skills possessed by the practitioners within the music education field can as well serve as source of knowledge and power. This knowledge is also surrounded by norms which inform power relations in the field. Noteworthy is the fact that these skills are possessed in different measures by both the male and female music educators. Thus, there may emanate disparities in regard to this knowledge hence power differences. This theory premises the inquiry into the power differences between the male and female music educators in Kenyan secondary schools. Additionally, it helps this study assess the discourses of power in the music education field in Kenya.

Michel Foucault also argues that power is inherent in all human relationships and institutions, and that it is exercised rather than possessed. He describes this power as circulatory rather than static since it can sometimes be displayed by those on whom it is exercised. He suggests that, “this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.” This power therefore, is dictated by circumstances hence held interchangeably in all relations thus, cannot be solely placed on one group. Deveaux (1994) faults this agonistic power model in that it falls short of analysing inner processes that condition women's sense of freedom or choice. However, Foucault`s effort to see power in a positive sense rather than the negative guides this study in the analysis of power differences.

In his book titled “Discipline and Punish”, Foucault describes disciplinary measures under which he discusses the Panopticon. This was a prison design by Bentham which allowed visibility to everyone incarcerated in it but not to the observer. The panopticon consists of numerous cages, in which a subject is alone and visible to the observer. Foucault (1979), states that the panopticon places the subjects being observed in a power situation in which they possess the power to police themselves. By the observer being invisible, the subject takes up the responsibility of self observance since they are not sure at any given time that they are being observed. In essence, the unverifiable knowledge on the presence or absence of their supervisors results to the subjects altering their behaviours in line with what is expected of them. Deveaux(1994) observes that the panopticon concept has been instrumental to various feminists in explaining women`s collusion with patriarchal standards of femininity. In essence, the societal norms surrounding the women compels them to voluntarily surveill themselves hence change their behaviours due to the uncertainties of being observed. Deveaux mentions practices taken up by women in an effort to achieve the appearance that is “acceptably” feminine. From her work, it is clear that women try to achieve the “ideal” image due to fear of the consequences of non-compliance. Thus, the women compromise through voluntary observation of self and change of behaviour. This theory is appropriate in this study as it analyzes ways in which the secondary school women music educators experience surveillance by various stakeholders in the field. It is also adopted to discuss the effects of surveillance on the behaviours of secondary school women music educators in Kenya.

**Butler`s theory of Gender Performance**

Butler (2011) relates performativity to the ritualized performance of an act. She argues that gender is performed. By performance, she refers to an action that entails performing a certain role. In other words, gender is something that is done or acted out rather than one that already exists. It is imperative to note that in regard to music, performance refers to the process in which music is presented to an audience or listeners. This involves singing, playing of instruments and conducting normally done on a musicing platform such as the stage. Butler`s use of performance however does not refer to specific performance platforms for gender. Rather, she argues that we are always acting out our gender roles as prescribed by the society around us. According to her, it is the repetition of these acts that yield a perceived gender identity. Hence, it is clear from this that what is perceived as feminine or masculine is largely dependent on reiteration of specific performances by that gender. One does not automatically obtain their gender identity at birth but rather become through doing.

Musically, the continuous preference of certain musicing activities by a specific gender yields its gender identity. Hence, the need of musicers to affirm their gender through their musicing activities arises. This theory guides this study in the analysis of musical practices as performed by music educators of secondary schools in Kenya. Specifically, it is instrumental in assessing the extent to which both male and female music educators are involved in the practices that impact on their gender identities.

Additionally, it is important to note that gender performance is regulated. While linking materiality of the body to gender performativity, Butler (2011) argues that sex is a regulatory ideal that is forcibly materialized through time. She points out that, sex is not determined by the body but by culture. Thus, according to her, both gender and sex draw their influence from cultural norms. Though it may be observable that these terms at times are used interchangeably, Butler does not fall short of emphasizing their differences. She further explains that the materiality of the bodies is constituted by the regulatory norms of "sex" which work in a performative way. Drawing from this, it is clear that sex provides a regulatory framework that controls gender performance. This study focuses on the regulation of the musical activities and practices within the music education spaces in Kenya. It specifically examines the framework under which music activities are regulated and how they are regulated. In this case then, this theory helps in establishing how the experiences of secondary school women music educators shaped by the regulatory norms of sex. Moreover, this theory is instrumental in discussing ways in which these women music educators regulate their practices and experiences as a form of agency.

**Methodology**

The data presented in this study is drawn from semi-structured interviews of female music educators of Bungoma County. The participants were four female music educators purposefully sampled from a population of seven. All the participants fell between age 29- 45 years of age and all of them engage in both teaching and participation at the KMF. Their names are represented in pseudonyms.

In respect to analysis of the data, the study applied the content analysis method. This entails analysis of content from interviews in order to identify the main themes (Kumar, 2011). All the data from the interview session was audio recorded and transcribed. There was familiarization with the raw data through reading and re-reading for the purpose of identifying broad themes representing the participant`s responses. Codes were then given to the pieces of data that were connected or related in terms of ideas and concepts. The responses will be grouped in line with the main themes. The data will then be interpreted and meaning will be attached to the findings.

**Traditional female roles**

In respect to positions in the music education field, all the respondents attribute the asymmetry in the leadership positions to the traditional female roles. A common idea that came up in the data from the female music educators was the vast roles and high expectations placed upon a female music educators. A vivid description of their busy schedules in both at school and home was given. Loice, Debby, Vivian and Lucy disclosed that being a female music educator is strenuous due to the multiplicities of responsibilities they have to shoulder. The need to play motherly roles even at school as stated by a respondent could be attributed to these prescribed traditional female roles. Although this era has seen most career women striving to balance between the home and the work duties, these responses shed light on how strenuous it is being a female music educator:

Female music educators are held up with numerous family duties as well as work responsibilities. We are required to take care of our young ones at the same time we are supposed to be advancing in our careers. It is confusing to do both at times and most of the time one has to suffer. At times, practice schedule is interfered with while taking care of our families thus retarding the musical growth of a person.

(Debby)

The positions are demanding, in the case of K.M.F a secretary leaves very early because he/she has to be there at the venue before the festival starts and has to be the last one to leave. If you are someone`s wife, how do you explain that you`re late because you were taking care of teams at the Kenya Music Festivals? It is difficult for some spouses to understand what happens in the music education spaces.

(Loice)

The state that the female music educators find themselves is characterized with numerous expectations they have to meet in terms of their roles. In essence, a female music educator has to keep their home in order, keep up with their practicing schedules, ensure that the music department runs smoothly, and perform music among others. All these aspects ought to be balanced and expectations met as their position entails being surveilled from various angles.. However, it may be difficult to play out these roles and the female music educator may have to strain inorder to ensure balance. As noted by Engebreston (2016), women experience difficulties in their strife to balance between family life and career advancement besides dealing with gender stereotypes. This challenge has also been elucidated descriptively by Acker and Dillabough (2007), Savigny (2014), Moreau et al., (2008) whereby respondents specifically narrate their challenges in their struggle to negotiate between their home duties and their careers. The concern on musical growth is pegged on the fact that the enhancement of musical skills is dependent on vigorous and consistent practice. It is crucial for music educators to engage in regular practice for the purpose of enhanced musicianship and teaching. However, the interference of practice schedules of the female music educator by multiple duties that surrounds them negatively impacts on their skills and perceived confidence hence placing them at a precarious position. Clearly, female music educator being surrounded by the numerous challenges only implies that she has to work extra hard in order to match her male counterparts.

Additionally, other women refrain from standing out in leadership positions for fear of marital issues that may arise from their periods of absence while they are engaged in leadership duties. While they are under pressure to perform at work and extra- curricular activities, they are constantly under surveillance at home and have to meet their curfew. The female music educators live in constant fear of being observed. The angles of surveillance range from the work place to their homes whereby they are under the observation of their husbands as expressed by Loice. For some, having to give detailed explanations on their whereabouts seems like a heavy task hence shy away from the leadership positions.

**Male hegemony**

From the responses, it was clear that the music education spaces in Kenya are dominated by the male music educators. This implies that various aspects of musicing like composition and performance is rarely ventured by female music educators. For instance, female choral conductors in the Kenya music festivals are just a drop in the ocean as compared to their male counterparts. This could be a result of various factors. However, in today`s era of improved access of Kenyan women to formal education, there is more to be achieved. The negligible numbers of women musicers as observed can not only stand to diminish their voices but also lessen their achievements and efforts to musical growth. In a study by Acker and Dillabough (2007), it is noted that for a long time the voices of women academics had been subdued as a result of their scarcity. Likewise, the outnumbering of the female music by the male music educators could as well impact negatively on their influence.

For a very long time we`ve served with Vivian as the only female music educators in this area. We have been attending the workshops and the female music educators are always the minority. Most of the music compositions I have listened to are done by the male. They are also very aggressive when vying for these leadership positions as compared to us women. At times, even us women music educators think that it is only the male who can offer good leadership.

(Loice)

Compositional skills are beneficial to music educators in Kenya since they are largely put into use during the K.M.F besides teaching in class. Most of the renowned Kenyan composers being male could attribute to the male supremacy in the music education field. In other words, they are in control in the field due to their musical skills. This is because the music education field will always be in need of compositions for choirs and bands during each year`s music festival hence the need for their presence. With the negligible numbers of female composers, even the female music educator themselves may find themselves seeking for compositions done by a male for the purpose of competitions. This affects their musical performance as it is dependent on the availability and even readiness of the composer to assist the female music educator. Additionally, the perception of the female music educators regarding their own abilities to lead besides musicing such that they may not believe in the leadership capabilities of their fellow women educators to lead.

Other males cannot give a female music educator an easy time if she is the leader, they are very chauvinistic and they don’t like it when a lady is the leader.

(Vivian)

Until recently, my school had hired a band instructor who was male. Additionally, a non music teacher was also appointed as one in charge of the school band. It seemed like they looked down upon me as this step deprived me of my rightful responsibility as a music teacher. However, the school got a new principal who shifted this responsibility to me.

(Debby)

As depicted, in the rare case where a female is in charge, she faces opposition from so many angles. This could be a consequence of the societal perceptions that somewhat reduces the engagements of women to subservient position as the male are placed in the position of dominance. Thus, the opposition encountered by the female music educator in leadership position from their male counterparts and other females arises from the notion of the male dominance that characterizes the music education field. Additionally, the decisions taken by some schools` management in regard to the music department could as well be interpreted as prejudicial. While the management could deem it fit to hire a band trainer to assist the female music educator in training the music students, the manner in which this whole exercise is carried out determines how the female music educator views herself in terms of abilities and position in the school. The hiring of a band trainer in Debby`s case could have been fuelled by a positive intent. However, the appointment of another teacher to that band raises the question of her musical ability and distrust that the school management explicates towards the female music educator. This places her in a precarious position.

I once adjudicated in a K.M.F and some people were not happy with the results. They raised questions such as “Why is it that we always win when Mr. X adjudicates?” I felt that they questioned my adjudication simply because I am a woman.

(Lucy)

Adjudication being part of the K.M.F, it is always every team`s wish to emerge victorious. While others emerge winners and happy with the adjudicator`s reports, other groups end up raising questions on the whole process. The questions could as well be directed to the adjudicator and even question her abilities if it is a female ignoring the fact that adjudicators at the K.M.F go through a training process before posting. One thing to note is that every winning team always supports the adjudication whether from a female or a male adjudicator. However, the comparisons that the participants may draw between the male and female adjudicators not only serve as a demotivation but also a ground for gender bias. While other female music educators may shun such complaints as petty, others could resort to shying away from musical activities that place them in a position of scrutiny and criticism.

**Corruption**

This refers to dishonest dealings that may be conducted by those in power. This dealings could as well be fuelled by the subjects upon whom this power is exercised as they also posses the power to refrain and repudiate. From the data, it became apparent that the music education spaces are intertwined with various forms of corruption. While these dealings may take the form of nepotism and bribery, three respondents in this study allude to the fact that they receive sexual advances from various stakeholders in exchange of a number of favors as pointed out by Debby. Similarly, In her study on women in academia, Savigny (2014) observes that handling sexual advances from their seniors at work is a major challenge they have to contend with.

From my experience, there is too much corruption when acquiring these positions and the females are at risk. Most female music educators are not given through the right channels. I mean the fair channels which involves considering academic qualifications and competence. Someone somewhere might demand the “exchange of bodies” so that one can be appointed to a certain responsibility in the field. I have gotten advances from quite a number of male who hold these offices and even from some mercenaries as payment for their assistance.

(Debby)

I have for a long time strived towards enhancing my music skills for the purpose of improving my teaching in class and performance at K.M.F. I love empowering young teachers who are joining us that they can excel without having to agree to any sexual advances. They only need to be patient so that they can grow in music.

(Vivian)

As Debby talks of lack of fairness in regard to merit, she sheds light on a frill position the female music educator finds herself in that may require her to give in to some sexual advances in order to receive assistance that pertains to musicing. This assistance includes composition, training of a team as well as being allocated certain responsibilities. In regard to training, some of the external assistance is sought and paid by the school`s management. However, some instances are characterized by sexual advances from those that are not contracted by an institution. This could imply that refusal to give in to any advances result to denial of musical assistance. This begs the question of why this assistance is necessary in the first place. The consequence of this lies in less participation in musicing as some female music educators rely on external help for choral training. On the other hand, it could also lead to the perception that any Kenyan female music educator that actively participates in musicing has given in to sexual advances which may not be true. As seen from Vivian`s response, there exists female music educators who are patient and determined to grow musically. This implies that the female music educator bears the power to refrain from any sexual advances. Though this does not summarize the experiences of all the female music educators, some of them may fear the lime light within the music education field inorder to prevent sexual advances and rumours. Specifically, they may engage in minimum musicing in an effort to avoid being observed. This negatively affects their career.

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