



## ONE, TWO, SING!

### HOW PRESCHOOL TEACHERS UTILIZE MUSIC ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM: A CASE OF KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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#### **Abstract:**

Research has proven beyond doubt that music activities are an invaluable resource in the learning process, especially for young children. However, little is known about how these music activities are used in the learning process. The current study set out to document the various ways preschool teachers use music activities in the course of instruction. It was anchored on the theory of Multiple Intelligences by Gardner. The researcher randomly selected one preschool from each of the twelve sub-counties in Kiambu County. From each preschool, one teacher was selected for inclusion in the study. This made a total of 12 respondents. A researcher-constructed observation guide was used to record how preschool teachers used music activities in real preschool classroom settings as they taught. The respondents were later interviewed. This article documents the findings, which revealed very innovative ways of integrating music activities in the course of instruction. It is recommended that teachers reflect and explore the best ways and times to use music activities in the learning process for maximum effect. Music may also be used at other levels of education to improve the learning environment.

**Keywords:** preschool, preschool teachers, music activities, multiple intelligence, musical intelligence, Kiambu County

#### **1. Introduction**

In the theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), Gardner (1983) posits that there are at least eight different types of “intelligences” associated with human beings. These

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intelligences are Linguistic intelligence, Logical-Mathematical intelligence, Naturalistic intelligence, Spatial intelligence, Interpersonal intelligence, Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence, Intrapersonal intelligence and Musical intelligence. This theory has opened up new ways of looking at the way teachers interact with learners and challenges educators to think about its' practical applications in the classroom. MI is based on the idea that students have different intellectual strengths. It follows, then, that students should have the opportunity to utilize their intellectual strengths in the course of learning (Griggs, Barney, Brown-Sederberg, Collins, Keith, & Iannacci, 2009) and to learn in ways appropriate to their intellectual strengths (Levin, 1994). The theory therefore provides educators with a conceptual framework for organizing and reflecting on everyday pedagogical practices. This article zeroes in on how teachers use the strengths of Musical intelligence in the classrooms.

### **1.1 Research objective**

This research was guided by one research objective: To find out how and when preschool teachers in Kiambu County use music activities in the course of instruction.

### **1.2 Rationale**

There is a dearth of research literature on the use of music activities in the pre-school classrooms, especially in Kenya and more studies are needed in this area. Furthermore, gaining new perspectives on observed uses of music activities in the pre-schools may promote an understanding of their effectiveness, providing the pre-school teachers with additional strategies for instruction, contributing to the overall efforts to make pre-school education more efficient. The observed uses of music activities may lead to strengthened interest in music, both as a method of instruction and as a way of enhancing learning, thus enabling educators to provide more appropriate instruction in the pre-schools. Furthermore, the findings from this study may inform teacher preparation centers on the need to restructure or evaluate their music and movement programs.

## **2. Literature review**

Research reveals that music aptitude, like all human characteristics, is normally distributed in the population and the majority of persons fall somewhere in the middle of the "bell curve" with average aptitude (Gordon, 1990). Additionally, Gardner (1999) in Seefeldt & Barbour (1998) points out that music is a way of knowing and may be a privileged organizer of cognitive processes, especially among young people. Teachers

should therefore use music activities in the classroom, for as Olson (2011) notes, music is an important and exceptionally useful tool in the way we learn and to deny its power is to squander a truly great resource.

Music activities create a favorable environment in the classroom and encourage students to be more committed to class activities. The students become more engaged with the class and interested in the class topic, pay more attention, participate more frequently, and carry out all their tasks with more energy and enthusiasm (Aguirre, Bustinza & Garvich, 2016). Music increases attention span, improves listening skills, and promotes oral language development. Using music activities in the preschool classroom may be an appropriate technique for teaching since children exhibit a natural love for music. These activities can aid in improving children's academic performance, positive behavior, increased productivity and motivation to learn and work (White, 2007).

There are many research studies on effects of using music activities in the classroom. For example, in a study investigating the effects that music and movement activities had on creating a better learning state for attention and engagement among first graders, Sandberg, Cory & Kathleen (2013) found that integrating music and movement produced positive results for two focus first-grade students. In another study in the use of music activities in teaching, Aguirre, Bustinza & Garvich (2016) found that songs create a favorable environment in the classroom and encourage students to be more committed to class activities. In yet another qualitative study conducted by Mills (2001), four teachers applied the MI theory in their classroom curricula particularly in the integration of musical experiences and found positive results in the performance of their students.

Preschool teachers appear to understand the importance of using music activities in the course of instruction. A study by Almodovar (2010) in Puerto Rico found that teachers used music activities every day in numerous ways with a variety of purposes, and they viewed music integration as a tool to fulfill students' needs. Another study on use of music across the curriculum by Malin (1993), found that most of the elementary classroom teachers (more than 70%) incorporated music activities in their lessons. These findings parallel a study in Kenya by Sinyei, Mwonga & Wanyama in 2012 which revealed that songs were the most popular educational resource in ECE's and were used in all the pre-schools. Indeed, a keen observation in Kenyan ECEs reveals that most teachers actually use music activities in the course of instruction (Andang'o 2007, Muya 2016). But whereas there have been a number of studies addressing use of music activities in the preschool classroom, none, or very few specifically address how and when the music activities are used in the classroom. This qualitative study set to find

out how music activities are used in the preschool classroom and therefore bridge the gap.

### 3. Participants and Methods

#### 3.1 Participants

Since the goal in this research was to describe and interpret rather than to generalize, there were no hard rules about how many participants should be included in the study (Litchman, 2010; Orodho, 2009). Moreover, in qualitative studies saturation occurs at about twelve respondents (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The participants in this study were drawn from Kiambu County, Kenya. Kiambu County has twelve sub counties. The researcher randomly selected one preschool from each of the twelve sub-counties in Kiambu County, making a total of 12 preschools. From each preschool, one teacher was selected for inclusion in the study.

#### 3.2 Methodology

The researcher used observation method and adopted a holistic observation approach, observing and recording all the musical activities that took part within the learning environment, supported by a researcher constructed observation guide. Each observation session lasted approximately one hour. The observation guide helped the researcher focus on observed uses of music activities within the classroom.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The researcher transcribed the songs used in the classrooms and made a note about how they were used during instruction. What follows is a selection of some of those songs.



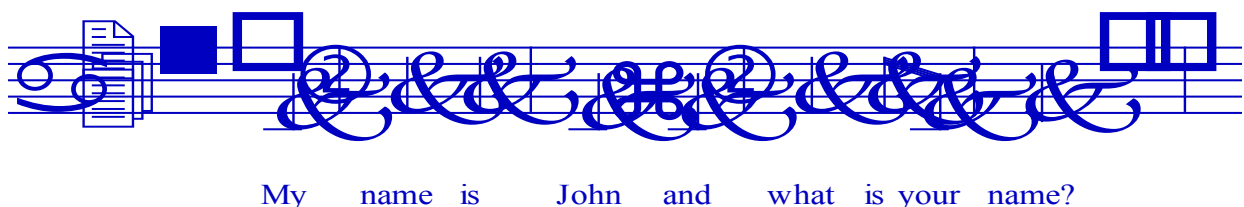
**Figure 1:** Who was number one?

This action song (figure 1) and was performed with a lot of dramatization and served to reinforce those children who had arrived earliest in the morning. It was performed at the beginning of the first lesson and names of the first ten learners to arrive that morning were input into the songs. The children smiled self-consciously when their names were mentioned, as the rest of the class pointed at them. This was a very good way of classroom management and setting a conducive environment for learning. Later on, this particular teacher explained this 'own composed' song had helped in ensuring learners arrived early enough.



**Figure 2:** Welcome our visitor

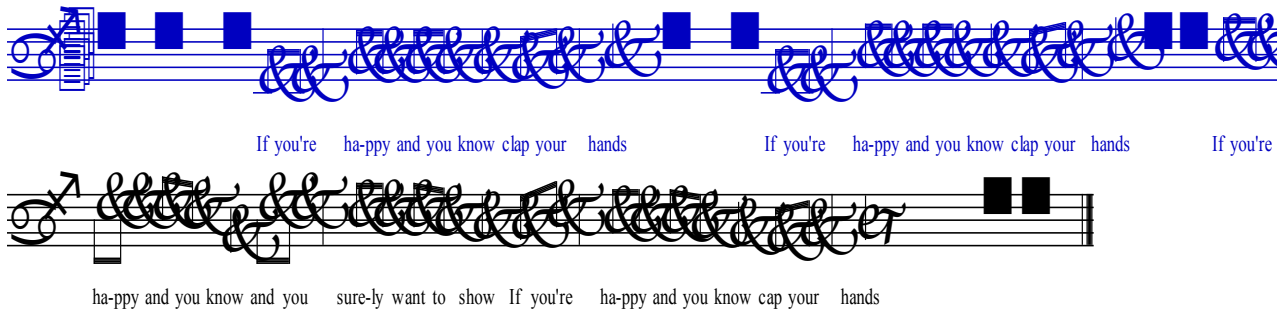
The song "Welcome our visitor" (figure 2) was sung in one preschool as the researcher entered the class. The children stood up and sang the song loudly looking pointedly at the researcher. The researcher responded by saying thank you. It was a wonderful way of welcoming visitors and gave the researcher time to greet the learners. It served the purpose of managing the learners and for student engagement.



**Figure 3:** What is your name?

When the researcher was settled in one preschool classroom, the teacher requested the children to introduce themselves. They used this little song game (figure 3) which started with the teacher asking one child her name. She answered in song and passed the question to the next child, who answered and passed the question over to the next

and so on until all the children had both asked and answered the question. It was very instrumental calming the children in the presence of a visitor. It also helped in getting the correct pronunciations and in keeping both rhythm and tune. This was an ingenious way of accomplishing the ordinary introductions, managing the class and keeping the learners engaged using song.

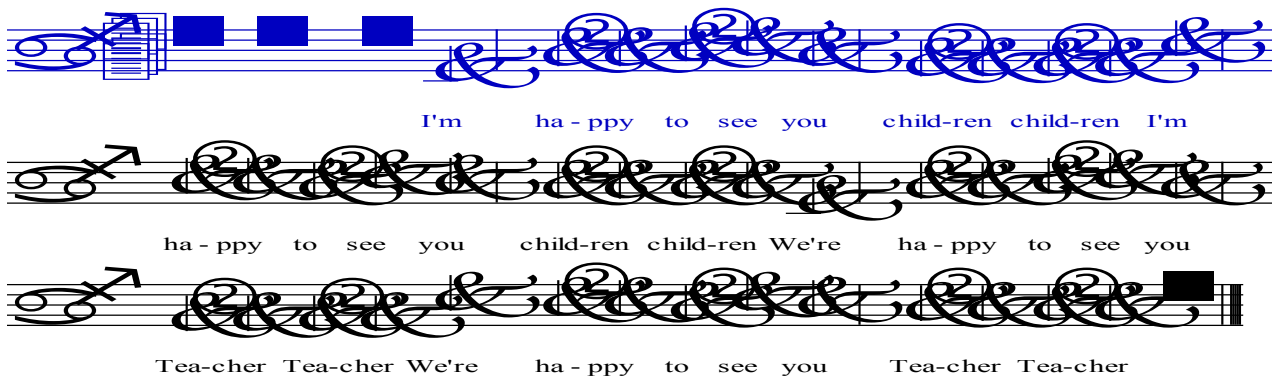


**Figure 4:** If you are happy

This song (figure 4) was performed first thing in the morning in one pre-school. The learners happily sang, clapped and stamped their feet in time with the song. It set up a good mood for the start of the day, making the learners relaxed. This was interpreted as student engagement. It mirrors a study, in which 93% of students interviewed said music relaxed them and helped them focus on tasks ahead (White, 2007).



**Figure 5:** Good morning to you!



**Figure 6:** I'm happy to see you

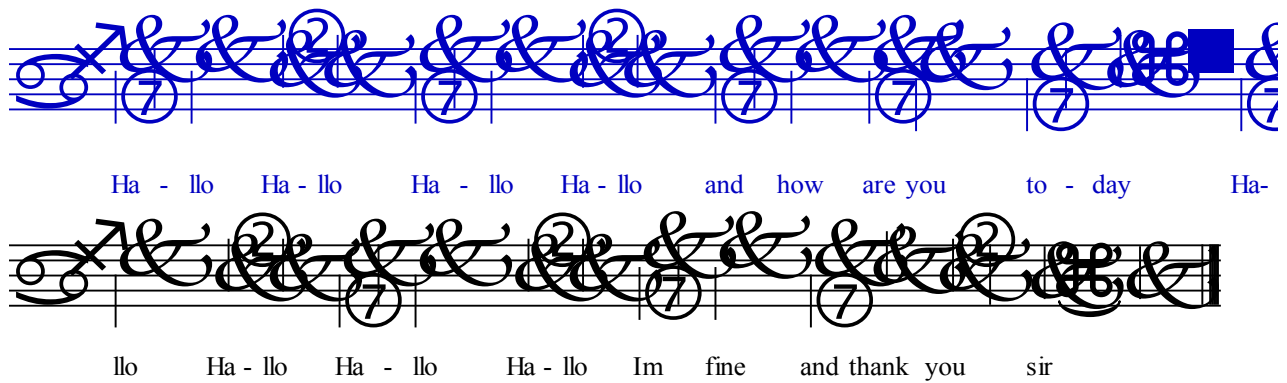


Figure 7: Hallo Hallo

These little songs (figures 5, 6 & 7) were used as greeting songs in the morning at different settings in different pre-schools. At the start of the day in one pre-school, the teacher began the song (figure 5). The children joined in and happily greeted each other, moving from one friend to the next. The other songs (figure 6 & 7) were performed in the same way but in different pre-schools. They set up very nice moods for the start of day. These songs catered for student engagement. They correspond to where teachers may take active steps to make students feel welcomed, accepted, safe, and valued (Trowler, 2010).

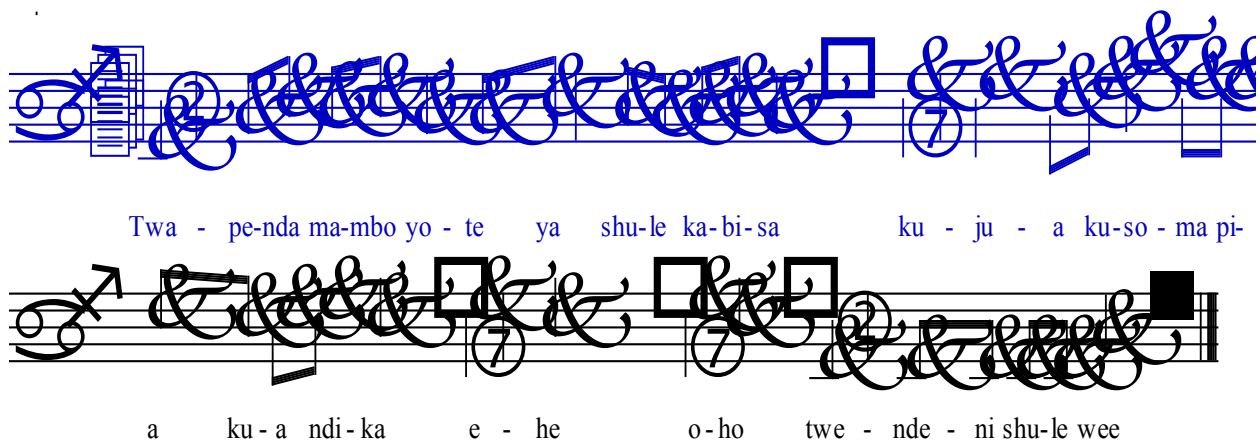
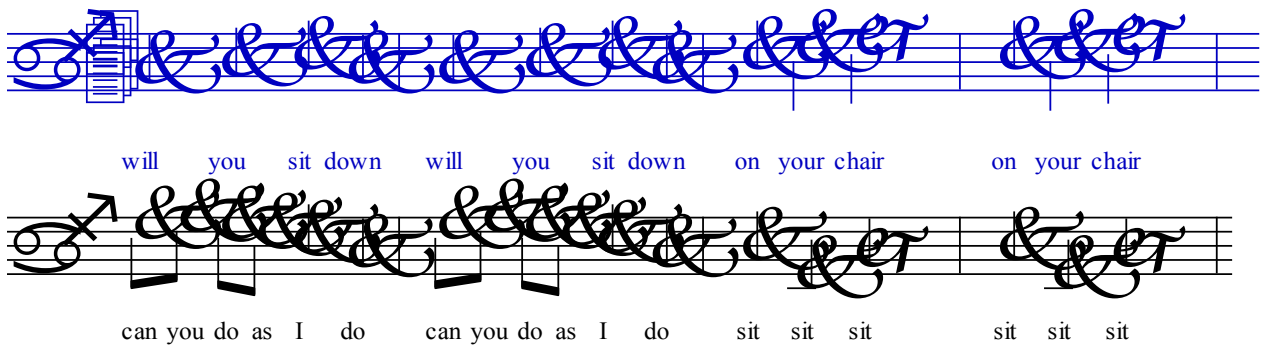


Figure 8: Twapenda mambo yote

This song (figure 8) was performed at the beginning of a day in a pre-school for student engagement. The children enthusiastically joined in the song and clapped along. It appeared to create a good mood and the learners were enthusiastic in the lesson after it.



**Figure 9:** Will you sit down?

This song (figure 9) is an adaptation of “Brother Joseph” tune. It was used by one preschool teacher to make the learners sit down in the middle of a lesson. They were excitedly standing up in class, which the researcher found to be quite common in pre-school classrooms. The teacher then started the song and the learners clapped as they sang. By the end of the song, all learners were quietly seated. This was interpreted as using music activities for classroom management.

Effective classroom management will decrease disruptive behavior, and make good use of instructional time, resulting in a classroom full of students staying on task, remaining quiet while working and staying calm which are all part of good classroom management (White, 2007).



**Figure 10:** Sanya, Sanya

The literal translation of the song Sanya, sanya is to return the “teachers’ learning materials back to the storage point. This particular song (figure 10) was performed in a pre-school when the learners were tidying up after a modeling session. It was started by the teacher and the learners joined in. As they sang the song over and over again, they were busy returning the plasticine to its storage place. They moved in time with the singing thus improving coordination. This song was used for giving instructions and directing the learners. It also helped in managing the transition into the next activity. This was an aspect of classroom management.



The examples given above clearly show how teachers can use music activities for student engagement and classroom control. This utilizes children's innate love for music in the course of learning.

## 5. Recommendations

Teachers, especially preschool teachers, need to plan beforehand when and how to use music activities in the course of instruction. They need to actively run through the next lesson in their minds and see the likely places where they can use music activities. They should also try to be as innovative as possible in use of these activities. Because of its very nature, music will help improve the learning environment.

## 6. Conclusion

In most classrooms, teachers concentrate on linguistic intelligence, but as Howard Gardner pointed out, this is only one of eight or more distinct types of intelligences (Milner & Milner, 2003). Teachers should use as many of these intelligences as they can in their classrooms. Music activities are valuable resources to expand students' abilities in listening, speaking and reading. Moreover, they can also be used for managing the classroom, giving instructions and keeping the learners engaged in the lesson.

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## About the Author

The author is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Administration and Planning, South Eastern Kenya University. He has taught music at preschool, primary and secondary schools in Kenya. He specializes in use of music activities across the curriculum.

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