

CHAPTER 13

THE EFFECT OF BACKGROUND MUSIC DURING STUDY TIME: A CASE STUDY OF MOUNT OLIVE COLLEGE UMUNYA

Ezeobiora, Chisom Odinaka & Esimone Chinyere C. (PhD)

Abstract

Most times students seem to be lazy with their reading habits. This could be a result of not being motivated to study. Many students of Mount Olive College are showcasing some negative attitude towards their studies. To change this attitude, survey method was employed in this study to implement background music during their study time. Twenty-three students participated in this exercise. The research was conducted for a week. The research focused on the effect of background music on students' study habits. The result suggested that many students' reading habits changed with the use of background music. Therefore, it is recommended that schools should include background music during the students reading time as this will motivate the students to concentrate and complete their tasks.

Keywords: Classroom learning, Background music, Students' study time, and Mount Olive College, Umunya.

Introduction

As the importance of the classroom setting has grown and evolved, teachers now have an opportunity and obligation to enrich and promote learning further than before. There are several approaches to teaching through which a teacher can positively affect the productivity, behaviour, and motivation of students. One of the specific strategies now commonly used to supplement and

enhance student learning is the use of background music. Research indicates that music plays an important role in culture and is a strong influence on today's youth. In response to this information, this study was conducted to assess the effect background music played in the classroom has on students. Studies have shown that music activates the right hemisphere of the brain which is related to more creative processes. This study compared students' attitudes to learning with background music and when they are studying without background music; to find out if music did optimize their learning capability.

It has been found that when both hemispheres of the brain are activated, cerebral cortex activity is improved (Reimer, 2004). Activating both hemispheres through background music and teaching also improves memory. Therefore playing soft music in the library will help students to be focused by activating both hemispheres of the brain. Music also evokes emotion. Once students are in a good emotional state they work more productively (Matuliauskaite, 2011). Studies have shown that when music is played, positive hormones are released in the body and can lower stress (Yehuda, 2011). Introductory research has begun to delve into the effect of background music on students' scholastic abilities, but it has yet to expand far enough to present practical applications. Some researchers have concluded that lyrical music is either distracting or cognitively impairing (Anderson & Fuller, 2010), but contradicting research implies that music assists in cognitive functions such as reading comprehension in specific settings.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of background music on classroom learning. How background music in the classroom affected the productivity, behaviour, and motivation of students. The researchers created a questionnaire to assess how the students felt after each study time to determine if the music affected their emotional state. This research will also provide both students and teachers with a further understanding of what helps or hinders individuals' ability to focus and retain information. This line of research will move in the direction of determining how different types of background music impact students' scholastic ability.

The following questions guided this study:

- To what extent does background music increase enduring classroom learning?
- To what extent does background music increase interest in studying?
- To what extent does background music increase learning achievement?

Significance of the Study

The information from this study will be of great value to all educators. It will provide information about a different strategy that could bring positive results into the classroom. Implementing background music in the classroom could help students to improve their study habit and be very effective in several different ways that could lead to positive performance and/or an increase in test scores. It could help raise the student's level of motivation, increase positive behaviour, and keep students on-task.

Review of the Literature

Background Music

Background music is music that plays in the background while studying, i.e., when reading a text, learners are intended to listen or hear this music but there is no relation between the music itself and the main task of learning the texts. Background music is songs we play when we are working, reading, sleeping or relaxing etc. at a lower volume. It is not meant to be loud or audible. Jam Lehmann (2017) states that “Learners are intended to listen to this music but there is no relation between the music itself and the main task”. Current studies suggest that incorporating background music into the learning environment may help to improve students' academic performance and create a positive effect on cognitive development. In schools today, educators are realizing that they need to use various strategies and resources to enhance the curriculum and learning of the students (Lewis, 2010, 3). One way to accomplish this is by “tapping” into the powerful link between music and learning. Background music could also positively affect the brain. Aside from studying music itself, simply playing music in the background can affect students' performance.

The job of educators is to do whatever is possible, mentally or physically, to reach all levels of children. Teachers agree that playing music in their classrooms during study time increases productivity by creating a calming atmosphere. Students are more relaxed when there is soft music playing in the background. When classical background music was used, it was noticed that with the music on, the students settled down quickly, stayed on task, and went about their schoolwork in a calm and relaxed manner. Students that are more relaxed and focused, and they stay on task better.

Classroom learning

Classroom teaching styles often reflect linguistic and mathematical styles of learning. Using music in the classroom will not only contribute to the development of musical intelligence but also enhance the learning process overall. Music can serve a vital role in the education of all students. Music enhances knowledge in the areas of mathematics, science, geography, history, foreign language, physical education and vocational training (as cited in Morrison, 2005, 33). The benefits of adding background music during learning are numerous and apply to more than just musical intelligence: "The implementation of the arts, specifically music, would help students raise mathematical achievement scores as well as enhance overall intelligence" (Bryant-Jones, Shimmins, & Vega, 2003, 28). Though music classes are not as valued as core subjects, the inclusion of music in all classroom settings is slowly becoming more widespread. Behar (2000) States that “Music is also universal and can open wonderful doors to the education of children” (p.26). Integrating music in the classroom can greatly affect the students' productivity. The increase in their productivity could result in many beneficial aspects, such as staying on task, increasing retention of material, improving grades/performance, increasing concentration levels, and accelerating learning.

In recent years many studies have been conducted on the effects of classical music on learning. The results of these studies are interesting and varied. Music is used to create desired moods, foster enjoyment of movement and dance, boost energy, increase happiness, bring back powerful memories, and help relaxation and focus. The music not only helps eliminate “noises” but also creates a sustained supportive ambience (Ghassemi, 2006). As a result, it could reduce the students' frustration levels enough to perform tasks effectively and efficiently. The more relaxed and focused the students are, the more they will stay on task and complete the assignment, which in turn improves grades. Staying calm not only helps the students stay on task and be productive with their school work, but it could also help them stay out of trouble. Ninety-three per cent of students interviewed in one study said music relaxed them and helped them stay on-task. Adding background music in the classroom also contributes to decreasing distractions and increasing concentration levels. For some students, background music helps cover up any distractions that they may have in the classroom, such as clocks ticking, pencils tapping, and chairs/desks moving. Playing positive music in the morning while the students are entering the class and unpacking helps set the mood for the day. A welcoming atmosphere is important for the students and one way it could be provided is through the background music. Music could be used in multiple ways to make the school day more stimulating for students (McGovern, 2000).

The effect (positive and negative)

Music is one tool that can aid in improving children's academic performance. Some issues to consider about music in the classroom are how music can lead to positive behaviour, how it might increase student productivity, how it motivates students to learn and work and how it distracts the student from learning. Music does not simply encourage passive learning in students; it also motivates them to become attentive, engaged, and productive. Increasing the students' motivation in the classroom through music is extremely important, particularly for at-risk populations. Playing classical background music in a classroom helps positively enhance the classroom climate. This helps motivate the students to learn, gets students on-task quicker, and helps improve their concentration. Classical music played in the classroom with an mp3 box has been used to create a better classroom environment to motivate learning and improve concentration (Lewis, 2002.) Beginning the day on a positive note could increase the student's motivation, which could lead to an overall willingness to learn and work, make good grades, be productive, and stay on task (Lawrence, 2001, p.1). Stimulating music could lead to increasing a student's arousal which could produce positive moods and increase the student's motivation to complete assigned tasks (Hallam, Price, &Katsarou, 2002). Creating an inviting atmosphere with background music could help students feel welcomed to participate in the learning experience, which leads to great attitudes, increased arousal and some tremendous motivation to learn. This helps motivate and prepare students for learning new tasks.

Music helps to endure studying for a long. For long study sessions, background music is helpful as

students are more focused and motivated when they are in a good mood, which helps them endure studying for a longer time. However, music puts us in a better mood, which makes us better at studying – but when it distracts us, it makes us worse at studying. In addition, loud or angry music has negative effects on reading comprehension, as well as mood. (Jam Lehmann 2017) implies that “it could lead to an additional burden on working memory” and that can make the students less efficient on the tasks. It is said that information recall has been proven to be more effective when it's done in a silent environment. Therefore students who prefer studying in a quiet place benefit more when it comes to recalling information.

Theoretical Framework

According to the arousal theory of motivation, each person has a unique arousal level that is right for them. When our arousal levels drop below these personalized optimal levels, we seek some sort of stimulation to elevate them. When it comes to mood, the arousal-mood-hypothesis defines mood as "emotions." Janana (2017) implies that “background music has an impact on arousal and mood, which in turn impact learning outcomes". Generally, a positive mood is associated with better learning outcomes whereas a negative mood or boredom hinders learning.

Methodology

Twenty- three students from Mount Olive College Umunya participated in this action research project. The students ranged in age from ten to fifteen years old. There were thirteen male students and ten females making it 23 students in the class. The students came from mostly high socio-economic families. All attended 3rd grade in Junior Secondary in the school.

Materials

Materials used to gather and interpret data for this study included: informal interviews with individual students and small groups and questionnaires. Pre-test surveys that measure students' attitudes towards music were administered to the students. At the beginning of this qualitative study, the researcher discussed with the principal of the school and the third-grade form tutor the purpose of this study and asked for their assistance and cooperation in helping make the study possible. The researcher informed the teacher and the students that the study would last for one week. All the students filled out a survey of the attitudes they held about music at the beginning of the study. Classical music played in the morning with a sound system while the students were entering the classroom, while they worked independently, and in small groups.

Throughout the study, the students were closely observed each day. The researcher and classroom teacher recorded classroom observations regarding the effects of the background music on the students. The students' motivation, productivity, and behaviour in the classroom were all noted throughout the study. The driving question was, “In what ways, if any, does the background music affect student performance in each subject?” The study also included informal

interviews, which consisted of a series of questions regarding what the students thought about the background music and how it affected their learning, productivity, and motivation. The interviews were held individually and in small groups. The interviews which were done through the use questionnaire lasted not more than five minutes. The questionnaires explored questions regarding the productivity, motivation, and behaviour of their students.

Analysis

The data consisted of pre-test surveys, questionnaires given to other teachers who used music in their classrooms, classroom observations taken by the researcher and classroom teacher, and individual and small-group interviews.

Findings and discussion of findings

The researcher found that implementing classical background music (water music by G.F Handel) in the classroom is strongly linked to increased motivation to learn, the ability to stay on-task, and the production of positive behaviours. The classroom environment was completely different; the music created an inviting, calm, and comfortable atmosphere that promoted the motivation to learn and stay on-task. The researcher designed a pre-test survey for the third-grade class to complete. One of the questions asked the student were if they would like to listen to music during their library time. Another question asked if the student thinks music could motivate them to do their work.

Table 1 shows the responses to these questions by displaying the total number of students' responses.

Table 1: Data from the Student Pre-Test Survey.

Questions	Yes	No
Would you like to listen to music during your study timeQ	17	6
Do you think music will motivate you to do your workQ	19	4

The researcher and classroom teacher observations and comments show that it is evident that playing soft classical background music influences the students' overall performance in the classroom in a tremendous way. The observations were made each day during the one-week study.

Table 2: Data from the Teacher in the Classroom: Teacher Survey (Questionnaire)

Questions	True	False	Undecided
Instrumental background music helps you to stay on task.	23	0	0
Lyrical background music helps produce positive behaviours.	9	12	2
The use of background music helps to keep you awake during long-term reading	17	6	0
The use of background music helps you to complete your task	23	0	0
Background music helps you to feel relaxed.	22	0	1
Background music didn't help at all.	0	0	0

The results in Table 2, simply demonstrate how the teachers agree with the students in the study. Some teachers implemented background music during their study time, yet still, provide the same results. This allows one to see that background music in the classroom is not only for third-grade students at Mount olive College Umunya but for other students as well.

Summary of Findings

The researcher found that implementing background music in the classroom was very effective. The classroom teacher was very pleased with the results. Each student improved their behaviour, motivation to learn, and ability to stay on-task. Again not all music can serve the purpose of learning. Loud, angry music and lyrical music can be a sort of distraction to the students which can make them less efficient on the task.

Recommendation

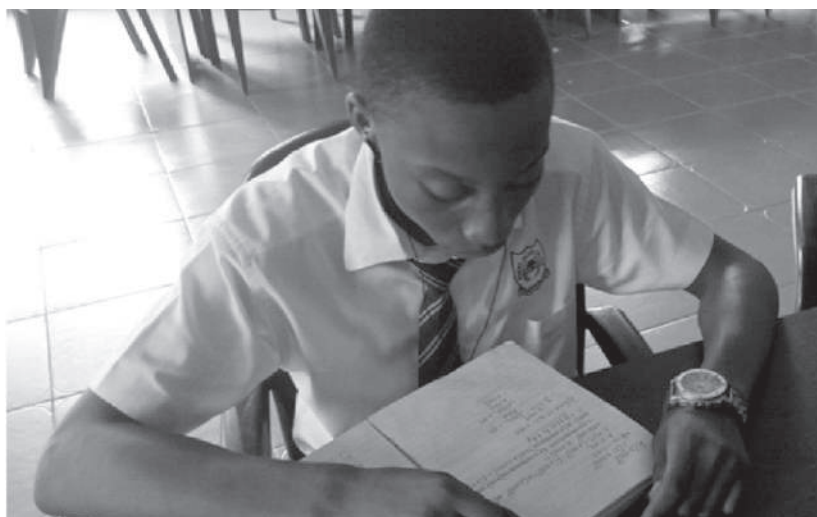
When students start showcasing some negative attitude towards their studies. Background music should be introduced during the student's study time. Secondary schools should as well introduce the background music during students' study time as it will help to motivate the students to study. It will also help the students to complete their tasks for the day.

Conclusion

This evaluation of implementing background music in a third-grade classroom, conducted by a music teacher at Mount Olive College enabled a detailed review of the impact that the background music helps raise the students' motivation to learn, stay on-task, and produce positive behaviours. The results suggest that background music in the classroom has a positive effect not just on the individual, but on the class as a whole. However, if you find listening to music a distraction, then it's best not to try using it as a way to make you a better or smarter student.

S/N	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1.	Did you notice that music was playing in the background?		
2.	Is the music distracting you?		
3.	Would you like to listen to music during library time?		
4.	Do you think music will motivate you to concentrate?		
5.	Background music helps you to stay on task.		
6.	Background music helps you to feel relaxed.		
7.	Background music didn't help at all?		
8.	Do you dislike hearing music in the background during your library time?		
9.	Is instrumental music better than vocal music?		
10.	Is vocal music better than instrumental music?		

Plate 1: *Students reading with background music at mount olive college Umunya.*



Reference

- Anderson, S. A. & Fuller, G. B. (2010). Effect of music on reading comprehension of junior high school students. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 25(3), 178- 186.
- Bryant-Jones, M., Shimmins, K., & Vega, J. (2003). Increasing math achievement through the use of music. *Clearinghouse*, 1-41. Retrieved April 29, 2021. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=ED478919>
- Behar, C. (2005). The effects of classical music on listening comprehension. *Clearing house*, 1-20. Retrieved April 29, 2021. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=ED438589>
- Ghassemi, J. (2006). Science suggest kids can't study and groove at same time; regions Of the brain please listen: it helps background music. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED522618.pdf>
- Halla, S., Price, J. & Katsarou, G. (2002). The effects of background music on primary School pupils' task performance. *Educational Studies*, 28(2), 111-121.
- Lehmann, J. A. M. & Seufert, T. (2017). The influence of background music on learning in the light of different theoretical perspectives and the role of working memory capacity. doi: [10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01902](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01902)
- Lawrence, D. L (2001). Using music in the classroom. *Advanced Brain Technologies*. Retrieved April 30, 2021, from www.advancedbrain.com
- McGovern, A.M. (2000). Working in harmony: Some effects of music in the classroom. *Clearinghouse*, 1-45. Retrieved April 30, 2021. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Working-in-Harmony%3A-Some-Effects-of-Music-in-the-McGovern/>
- Matuliauskaite, A & Zemeckyte, L. (2011). Analysis of interdependencies between students' emotions, learning productivity, academic achievements and physiological parameters. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266870133_Analysis_of_Interdependencies
- Reima, B. (2003). A philosophy of music education, advancing the vision (3rd ed). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Yehuda, N. (2011). Music and stress. *Journal of Adult Development*, 85-94. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2011-10798-006>