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Bifurcated Peripheralisation: Music, Performing Arts, and Kenyan Education Reform Commissions from Independence to BETA, 1964–2023

Bifurcated Peripheralisation: Music, Performing Arts, and Kenyan Education Reform Commissions from Independence to BETA, 1964–2023

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Abstract
This article analyses how Kenyan education reform commissions and allied culture-sector instruments have shaped the position of music and the performing arts in the national school curriculum since independence. It applies critical policy discourse analysis to eight commission and task-force reports, together with two culture-stream policy instruments and a subsequent sessional paper, and reads them through a three-register scheme covering epistemic, economic and infrastructural dimensions. The article advances the concept of bifurcated peripheralisation. Music appears repeatedly in two policy streams, education and culture, yet the two streams take up one another's recommendations only partially and intermittently, so that the curriculum-to-career pipeline that would sustain musicianship is built by neither. Within this condition it identifies a sub-mechanism, peripheralisation by absorption, in which music is not abolished but folded into progressively larger composite categories. The evidence indicates that music held compulsory and examinable status at primary level for a single fourteen-year window, and that this standing was lost after 1999, in a period of curriculum decongestion, through an instrument the sources consulted do not identify. A forty-one-year interval separates the 1984 recommendation of a College of Performing and Creative Arts from a comparable 2025 re-announcement, an interval the article reads as diagnostic of a governance architecture without a joined-up pathway for music.

Introduction

At the closing ceremony of the Kenya Music Festival in August 2025, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Education, Julius Ogamba, described as desirable the establishment of a national academy

for the creative and performing arts, stating that "the ministry will set up a team to develop a program for such an academy, aligning it with the three new CBE pathways" (The Standard, 2025). The announcement was not reported as the completion of earlier policy; that continuity is this article's interpretation. In broad institutional terms, it restated a proposal made forty-one years earlier by the Presidential National Music Commission chaired by Washington A. Omondi. Paragraph 155 of the 1984 Omondi Report recommended that the University of Nairobi be reorganised to include an "eighth constituent college", a "College of Performing and Creative Arts" encompassing music and dance, fine art and design, and drama (Republic of Kenya, 1984, para. 155). The 1984 proposal and the 2025 announcement are not identical in institutional form: the first was a constituent college of a university, housing departments that would keep their own identity and staff (Republic of Kenya, 1984, para. 159); the second, on the reports available, is a standalone academy whose level and governance were not settled.

This article asks how a state that has convened repeated education reform commissions, and that has periodically affirmed the value of indigenous culture, has arrived at a settlement in which music has limited independent standing in the school system. The answer it proposes is that the interval reflects a specific structural condition rather than a series of isolated oversights. Music is not absent from Kenyan state discourse; it appears repeatedly, in an education stream and, in parallel, in a music-and-culture stream that runs from the Omondi Commission through the Permanent Presidential Music Commission to the culture-sector instruments of 2023. The two streams integrate only partially and intermittently. Recommendations made in one are sometimes taken up, often after long delay, and frequently reversed, while the infrastructural site at which music education becomes sustainable falls between them. The article names this condition bifurcated peripheralisation and identifies a mechanism within it, peripheralisation by absorption, through which music has been progressively absorbed into larger composite categories: from a named, examinable subject under 8-4-4 in 1985, to a component of Creative Arts at primary level by the late 2000s, and, in the competency-based years, through the merger of performing and visual arts and physical education into Creative Arts and Sports in junior school from January 2024 (Republic of Kenya, 2023d).

The paper positions itself against three bodies of work. Kenya-focused music-education scholarship, led by Emily Akuno, documents the curricular position of music, the preparation of teachers and the governance dissonances that weaken higher music education (Akuno, 2005, 2012, 2015a, 2019); this work is diagnostic and pedagogical, and the present article offers a structural, cross-commission policy reading, treating Akuno's finding that primary teachers ceased to prioritise music after 1999 as evidence to be traced in the record rather than as settled background. The nearest precedent, Odwar (2005), covers the primary-school curriculum alone; this article extends its approach to the full commission sequence and to the culture stream. Pan-African decolonial scholarship, notably Nzewi (1997, 2007), Agawu (2003, 2016, 2025) and Ngũgĩ (1986), establishes that the marginalisation of indigenous music is a cross-national pattern, with comparable accounts in the United Kingdom (Ricketts, 2025), South Africa (Carver, 2017) and Ghana (Dordzro, 2023); what remains undone, and what this article undertakes, is a cross-commission policy reading of the Kenyan case. Two studies in this journal bear on the pipeline the article reconstructs: Kigozi (2025) on technology-mediated pedagogy as a route to safeguarding traditions when embedded in teacher practice, and Mueni (2025) on

parent-teacher collaboration in competency-based learning, which speaks to the household-level attitudes to music that Omondi diagnosed. The methodological precedent is Ricketts' (2025) critical policy discourse analysis of United Kingdom music-education policy.

Theoretical Framework

Bifurcated peripheralisation names a structural condition with two components. The first is bifurcation: music is governed across two institutional streams, an education stream that determines what is taught, examined and resourced in schools, and a music-and-culture stream that governs music as a cultural sector. The second is peripheralisation: across both streams, music is kept present in policy language while the pipeline that would sustain it is not durably built. To keep the construct testable, the article specifies five observable dimensions along which music's position can be assessed: administrative integration, whether the two streams act on one another's recommendations; pedagogical integration, whether music is taught as a distinct discipline or dissolved into a composite; examination status, at which level; specialist teacher supply; and progression from school to tertiary study and work. Peripheralisation is claimed when these dimensions move, across documents, toward absorption and discontinuity. The condition would be disconfirmed by the opposite: sustained cross-stream uptake, a stable examinable subject, a growing specialist-teacher pipeline, or a funded progression route.

Within this condition the article identifies a sub-mechanism. Peripheralisation by absorption is the process by which music is folded into successively larger composite categories. Absorption is analytically distinct from abolition: abolition produces an identifiable, contestable act, whereas absorption proceeds through administrative rationalisation and so is harder to resist. The article follows Bernstein (2000) in reading absorption as a weakening of the classification that insulates music as a category, and applies the concept to named transitions; a caution follows from Bernstein's own terms, that naming music as a distinct subject strengthens, rather than weakens, its classification. The absorption chain therefore runs to the point at which music becomes a component of Creative Arts; the appearance of a named senior-school music subject in 2017 is treated as a counter-case, while the 2024 merger of music with dance and the junior-school Creative Arts and Sports grouping of 2024 are the absorption steps of the competency-based years (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2017, 2024; Republic of Kenya, 2023d). An apparent tension in the record requires clarification: the Omondi Report's own proposal placed music in a composite College of Performing and Creative Arts, yet the article treats later composites critically. The difference, as paragraph 159 of the report makes clear, is that Omondi's College grouped disciplines that would each keep their own department and specialist staff; a named department inside a college protects a discipline in a way that a share of a composite school subject, taught by non-specialists, does not (Republic of Kenya, 1984, para. 159).

Each document is read against three registers. The epistemic register asks whose music is treated as knowledge: which traditions are named, which are absent, and how African musical knowledge is positioned relative to the Western canon; it draws on Nzewi (1997, 2007), Agawu (2003, 2016, 2025) and Ngũgĩ (1986). The economic register asks whether music is framed as productive labour or as ornament, and whether it is placed among compressible subjects when curriculum overload becomes the governing problem; it draws on the productive-versus-ornamental distinction as it appears in the documents themselves and in Kenyan education

history (Sifuna, 1990; Bogonko, 1992). The infrastructural register asks whether a document addresses the pipeline: teacher training, examinable structure, higher-education pathways and material resources; it draws on Akuno (2012, 2015a) and Bernstein (2000). For the coding of silence, the article follows Bacchi's (2009) question about what a document leaves unproblematised and Huckin's (2002) account of textual silence. These supply four operational tests: whether the matter fell within the document's mandate, whether its genre would be expected to address it, whether the topic appears under another term, and whether the text consulted is complete. Silence is coded only where all four conditions hold.

Methodology

The article applies critical policy discourse analysis (CPDA) to a corpus of Kenyan education and culture-sector policy instruments produced between 1964 and 2023. CPDA, drawing on Ball (2015), Bacchi (2009) and Fairclough (2013), reads policy not as neutral technical instruction but as discourse in which problems are constructed and alternatives foreclosed. These are related but distinct approaches, and the article is explicit about how each is used: Bacchi's problem-representation questions interrogate how each document frames music and curriculum overload; Fairclough's attention to textual and inter-textual relations traces language across documents; and Ball's distinction between policy as text and policy as discourse reads uptake and non-uptake.

The corpus comprises eight commission and task-force reports across the education and music-and-culture streams: the Kenya Education Commission (Ominde, 1964); the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (Gachathi, 1976); the Presidential Working Party on the Second University (Mackay, 1981); the Presidential National Music Commission (Omondi, 1984); the Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training (Kamunge, 1988); the Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Koech, 1999); the Task Force on the Re-alignment of the Education Sector (Odhiambo, 2012); and the Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (Munavu, 2023). To these are added two culture-stream instruments of 2023, Executive Orders No. 1 and No. 2 of 2023, and the 2024 Sessional Paper. The Omondi Report is a music commission rather than an education-reform body, and is treated as the pivot of the music-and-culture stream. The selection rule was the inclusion of every national-level commission or task force since independence whose mandate covered the school curriculum, together with the principal culture-stream instruments governing music as a sector. The Task Force on the Transition to the Competency-Based Curriculum (Chege, 2019) is within scope on this rule; it is treated as an implementation task force whose curricular decisions were carried into the instruments already in the corpus. The 2017 Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the 8-4-4 primary curriculum instruments are listed in the inventory as curriculum instruments although they are not commission reports. Table 1 sets out the inventory.

Table 1: Document inventory: corpus instruments, stream, genre, access form, and role in the argument

Document (chair, year)	Stream	Genre	Consulted as	Role in the argument
Kenya Education Commission (Ominde, 1964)	Education	Commission report	Secondary sources	Founding curriculum settlement; music not yet a named object
National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (Gachathi, 1976)	Education	Committee report	Secondary sources	Recommends an examinations body; cultural elevation via language
Presidential Working Party on the Second University (Mackay, 1981)	Education	Working-party report	Secondary sources	Architecture of 8-4-4
8-4-4 primary curriculum instruments (c. 1985)	Education	Curriculum instrument	Secondary accounts	Named music examinable at end of primary from 1985
Presidential National Music Commission (Omondi, 1984)	Music / culture	Commission report	Full text (kenyalaw.org)	Pivot document; full pedagogical programme for music
Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training (Kamunge, 1988)	Education	Working-party report	Secondary sources + Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988	Cost-sharing; restates artiste-training institution (point of contact)
Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Koech, 1999)	Education	Commission report	Full scan + executive summary	Decongestion; period after which primary examinable status is lost
Task Force on Re-alignment of the Education Sector (Odhiambo, 2012)	Education	Task-force report	Full text (vision2030.go.ke)	Records composite Creative Arts and talent-stream origin
Basic Education Curriculum Framework (KICD, 2017)	Education	Curriculum instrument	Full text (KICD)	Names Arts and Sports Science pathway; music and dance listed as separate subjects (pp. 55, 66)
Task Force on Transition to the Competency-Based Curriculum (Chege, 2019)	Education	Task-force report	Secondary sources	Transition body; decisions carried by 2017 Framework and Munavu; teacher-education brief
Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (Munavu, 2023)	Education	Working-party report	Full text (education.go.ke)	Consolidates pathways; inherits the senior-school architecture
Ministry circular on CBC learning areas (2023; effective Jan 2024)	Education	Administrative circular	Government source	Merges performing/visual arts and PE into Creative Arts and Sports (junior school)
Executive Order No. 1 of 2023	Music / culture	Executive instrument	Government source	Arts, incl. Creative and Performing Arts and

				Research and Conservation of Music, in State Dept for Sports and the Arts; PPMC an institution
Executive Order No. 2 of 2023	Music / culture	Executive instrument	Government source	Moves music function and PPMC to State Dept for Culture, the Arts and Heritage
KICD senior-school curriculum designs (2024)	Education	Curriculum instrument	Full text (KICD)	Names single subject Music and Dance (merger of 2017 subjects)
Sessional Paper No. [X] of 2024 (National Education Policy)	Education	Policy paper	Ministry copy (adopted status unconfirmed)	Carries 2023 reforms into policy language (epilogue)

Each document was coded against the three registers; the full codebook, the document-by-register matrix and the search log are provided as supplementary material. Access to the corpus is uneven. The Omondi Report is available in full on kenyalaw.org and is quoted from its paragraph-numbered text. The Munavu report (2023) and the Odhiambo Task Force report (2012) are available in full from government sources. The Koech Report (1999) was consulted in the scanned full text held by the Kenya National Assembly library and in its published executive summary, from which the decongestion recommendation is quoted. Five reports, Ominde, Gachathi, Mackay, Kamunge and the Chege task-force report, were consulted principally through secondary sources (Sifuna, 1990; Bogonko, 1992; Okech & Asiachi, 1992; Inyega et al., 2021), and for Kamunge through the government's own Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988. The article accordingly limits what it infers from these reports; claims about silence are confined to documents consulted in full, and primary verification in the Kenya National Archives and the Parliament library is identified as outstanding fieldwork.

Findings

Pre-Omondi background: Ominde (1964), Gachathi (1976) and Mackay (1981)

Three education-stream reports frame the pre-Omondi period. The Ominde Commission established the 7-4-2-3 structure that governed schooling until 1985; its principal ambition, on the available secondary accounts, was an Africanisation of the curriculum to reflect national values (Sifuna, 1990; Inyega et al., 2021), but music is not reported among the practical subjects it foregrounded (Okech & Asiachi, 1992). The Gachathi Committee recommended a national examinations body (the Kenya National Examinations Council was established in 1980 under its own Act (Republic of Kenya, 1980), four years later); music is not named in the cultural categories the committee elevated, which were chiefly linguistic. The Mackay Working Party is remembered as the architect of the 8-4-4 system implemented from 1985. Because these three reports were consulted only through secondary sources, the article does not read music's non-appearance in them as proven textual exclusion; the pipeline for music is not documented in the accounts consulted, and primary archival verification remains outstanding. Under 8-4-4 as it was implemented, music was named among the subjects of the new primary curriculum and, from 1985, became examinable at the end of primary (Odwar, 2005; Akuno, 2005). This is the clearest point at which the education stream built examinable primary music; whether it did so in response to Omondi or independently is examined below. That standing later eroded, and

the same scholarship records music being treated as optional in practice at primary level by the early 2000s. Music had been examinable at secondary level before 1985, as Figure 1 shows, and has remained so since; the compulsory-examinable claim is specific to primary schooling.

The Omondi Music Commission (1984)

The Presidential National Music Commission chaired by Washington A. Omondi is the only Kenyan commission to have addressed music pedagogy end to end. Appointed by Gazette Notice in 1982, it produced a report of unusual depth (Republic of Kenya, 1984). The epistemic diagnosis is systematic. Paragraph 59 speaks of "the decolonization of our minds" in relation to indigenous culture (Republic of Kenya, 1984, para. 59), phrasing that precedes Ngũgĩ's (1986) Decolonising the Mind by two years; the narrower and defensible point is that a Kenyan state commission used decolonial language, and built an argument on it, as 8-4-4 implementation began, although comparable state-level diagnoses of colonial cultural alienation are older, including Nyerere's 1962 inaugural address on culture (Nyerere, 1966). Paragraph 9 names the displacive methods by which colonial religion and education alienated Kenyans from cultural values; paragraph 21 records that music and dance were targeted for suppression; paragraph 10 observes that the African child is taught to feel ashamed of indigenous musical traditions. On curricular content, paragraph 69 records that syllabi are so concentrated on Western music as to be "of little relevance" to the Kenyan situation; paragraph 95, within the teacher-training-college section, that the college syllabus student-teachers follow omitted African music. The economic register is not a simple productive-versus-ornamental opposition. Paragraph 62 frames the music curriculum as developing skills to make instruments for local and foreign markets, a creative-economy vision that anticipates later policy; paragraph 89 extends this to employment. But the report is candid about the ornamental framing at the household level: paragraph 87 names parental attitudes in which music is seen as lacking educational or economic value, and paragraph 88 records its timetable expression, a single weekly period, often the last on a Friday.

Omondi's infrastructural findings are its most damning. Table I of the report, which follows paragraph 68, lists Kenya Certificate of Education music candidates for 1980 to 1982 as 43, 81 and 78, together with Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education entries, which Figure 1 also plots, and names the schools in which candidates sat. On the table's own naming, seven of the fourteen schools are girls' schools; several are former-European or provincial mission schools, and the list also includes Thika School for the Blind, which fits neither description. Figure 1 is presented as an illustration of small uptake at the terminal certificate level in the pre-8-4-4 period; without the total candidature it does not measure peripheralisation, and these are secondary-level figures, whereas the compulsory-examinable claim concerns primary level. On teacher supply, paragraphs 82 and 83 record that the Commission commended a United States Peace Corps programme while noting that only a few schools benefited. Paragraphs 90 to 99 document that from 1974 music was compulsory in all teacher-training colleges, but that the syllabus was theoretical, based on elementary Western content, and detached from the primary syllabus the student-teachers would teach; paragraph 91 gives the colleges' average annual output of about six thousand teachers, and paragraph 150 records that the music programme at Kenyatta University College had failed to take off.

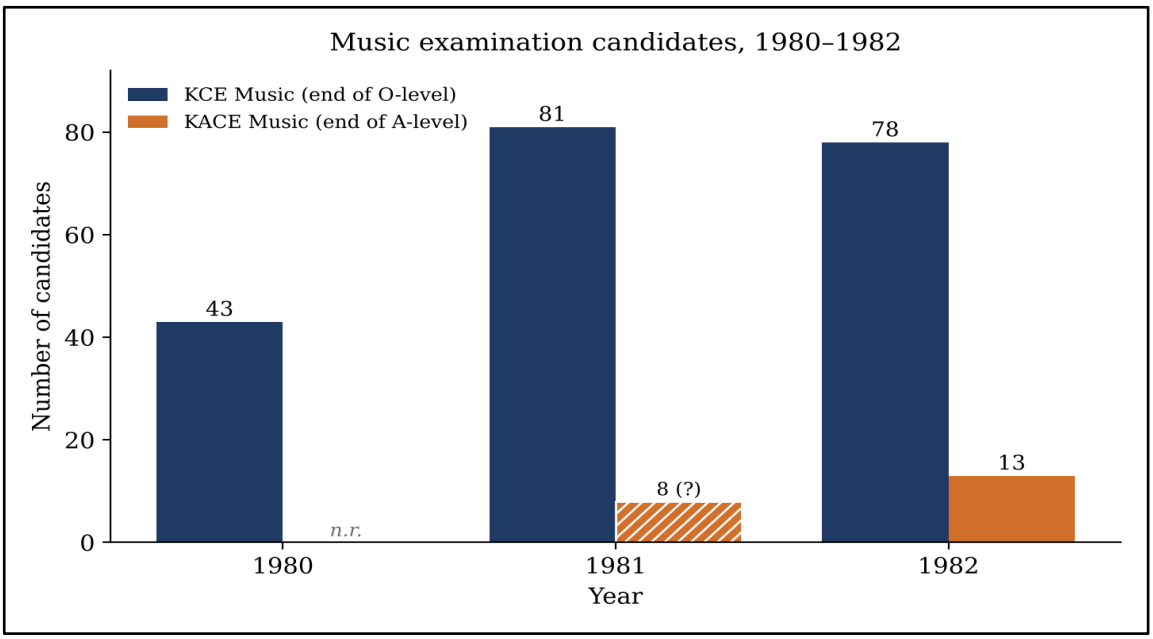


Figure 1: Music candidate numbers in the Kenya Certificate of Education (KCE, end of O-level) and Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (KACE, end of A-level), 1980 to 1982. Data from the Omondi Report (Republic of Kenya, 1984, para. 68).

Note: *KACE figures for 1980 were not reported (n.r.); the 1981 KACE value (hatched, shown as 8) cannot be confirmed from the online scan, in which the row reads ambiguously, and should be checked against the printed report. The figure is illustrative; the underlying totals are small and the full candidature is not given in the report. Schools are classified from the table's own naming, which marks seven of the fourteen as girls' schools; the remainder are not classified beyond what the table states.*

At paragraph 155 the report makes the recommendation whose fate frames the trajectory: an "eighth constituent college" of the University of Nairobi, a "College of Performing and Creative Arts" encompassing music and dance, fine art and design, and drama (Republic of Kenya, 1984, para. 155). Paragraph 159 further recommended departments of music and dance offering degrees at the University of Nairobi and at a second university. Table 2 traces the fate of the principal Omondi recommendations, with evidence for each judgement. The College proposal (paragraph 155) was not implemented in the form proposed; the examinable-primary-music recommendation (paragraph 89(b)) converged with the 8-4-4 reform in 1985; and the artiste-training-institution idea reappeared, in substance, in the Kamunge Report of 1988. The record is one of partial and intermittent contact, not of two streams that never met. The analytical significance of Omondi is that a full pedagogical programme, produced in the music-and-culture stream, ran alongside an education stream that built one of its elements and left the institutional and teacher-training architecture unbuilt. This is bifurcated peripheralisation as the article defines it: not the absence of contact, but contact too partial and too reversible to sustain a pipeline.

Table 2: Fate of the principal Omondi (1984) recommendations.

Omondi recommendation	Content	Fate	Evidence
Para. 89(b)	Music examinable at the end of primary	Converged (1985)	Examinable primary music under 8-4-4; uptake not traceable to Omondi (Odwar, 2005)
Para. 90–99	Reform of teacher-training-college music syllabus	Not acted upon	Primary teacher-education syllabi revised post-1984 but not to close the competence gap Omondi named (Akuno, 2012)
Para. 155	College of Performing and Creative Arts (constituent college)	Not implemented as proposed; restated 1988; re-announced 2025 in altered form	Kamunge (1988); 2025 announcement (Hapa Kenya, 2025; The Standard, 2025)
Para. 159	Degree-level departments of music and dance at two universities	Partially / unverified	University music departments exist; direct lineage not established
Paras. 62, 89	Creative-economy and employment pathway for music	Not realised at school level	Culture-stream creative-economy framing without a school pipeline

The Kamunge Working Party (1988) and the Koech Commission (1999)

The Kamunge Working Party presented its report to the President on 14 April 1988 (Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988). It is remembered for formalising cost-sharing, a financing turn that intensified the household-level sorting Omondi had diagnosed. On the secondary attestation available (Sifuna, 1990; Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988), the Working Party also recommended a national council for the creative and performing arts and a national institution to train artistes. This recommendation is, in substance, the Omondi paragraph 155 proposal restated in the education stream's own manpower review four years later; it is the clearest single point of contact between the streams. Whether the Permanent Presidential Music Commission, established by Gazette Notice in April 1988, answered this recommendation is not established in the sources consulted and is flagged as a question for primary research.

The Koech Commission produced the Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training report of 1999. Its proposed twelve-year integrated basic-education structure was rejected, but its general recommendation for curriculum decongestion, "a manageable curriculum content at all levels of education that does not overburden the learners and educators" (Republic of Kenya, 1999, para. 7.6), framed practical subjects as compressible, and it is the period after Koech that coincides with the loss of music's compulsory and examinable status at primary level. No implementing instrument can be quoted from the report; the implementing route is not identified in the sources consulted, and the end of the primary examinable window is dated from secondary scholarship (Odwar, 2005). The downstream effect is documented in Kenya-focused scholarship rather than in the Koech text: Akuno (2005) and Odwar (2005) record that, after 1999, primary teachers increasingly ceased to teach music where it was neither compulsory nor examinable. The Koech Report does not refer to the Omondi Commission's 1984 recommendations; this negative claim rests on a reading of the executive summary and an OCR-

processed keyword search of the scan for the terms Omondi, music commission, performing arts and college, with the relevant chapters read manually where OCR was unreliable.

The Odhiambo Task Force (2012) and the Munavu Working Party (2023)

The Odhiambo Task Force recorded, drawing on the 2009 summative evaluation, that Creative Arts, a composite subject comprising music, art and craft, was compulsory at primary level but hardly taught (Republic of Kenya, 2012). This dates the composite Creative Arts subject to the 8-4-4 period, not to the competency-based framework of 2017, and places the gap between formal compulsion and classroom delivery inside the state's own record. In the proposed structure, music appears under talent identification rather than among the core learning domains; a senior-level specialisation stream gathering performing arts, creative arts and sports prefigures the pathway the 2023 Working Party would inherit.

The Munavu Working Party was appointed by Gazette Notice dated 29 September 2022 (Republic of Kenya, 2023a). It framed the central problem of the competency-based curriculum as overload and recommended a rationalisation of learning areas, a move in the same register as Koech's decongestion. The senior-school pathway into which music falls, Arts and Sports Science, was not created by the Working Party; it is already named in the 2017 Basic Education Curriculum Framework (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2017), which the Working Party inherited. The 2017 Framework lists music and dance as separate optional subjects in the performing-arts grouping (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2017, pp. 55, 66); the single subject "Music and Dance", alongside "Theatre and Film" and "Fine Arts", is the later naming in KICD's 2024 senior-school curriculum designs (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, 2024). Music was therefore a named subject in 2017 and was merged with dance in 2024, after the Working Party; the 2017 naming is a counter-case and the 2024 merger a further absorption step. The 2024 Sessional Paper commits the system to national cultural goals, for example "to promote respect for and development of Kenya's rich and varied cultures" (Republic of Kenya, 2024, s. 2.3.1), while its one explicitly Afrocentric phrase, to "champion Afro-centrism in the curriculum" (Republic of Kenya, 2024, p. 2), describes the post-independence reforms in its history section rather than the 2023 settlement; the paper's forward-looking commitments make no mention of music or the performing arts. That silence beside stated cultural goals, which meets the silence rule's mandate test, is stronger evidence for the article's rhetorical-structural claim than the label "Afrocentric". The article is careful about level: music remains examinable at secondary level, and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education Music, with its practical paper, was examined on 21 to 24 October 2025 (Kenya National Examinations Council, 2025). At senior school, the first Grade 10 cohort entered only in 2026, so examinable continuity, specialist-teacher supply and progression cannot yet be judged.

The culture stream and executive orders of 2023

Executive Order No. 1 of 2023 placed the arts, including a "Creative and Performing Arts" function and "Research and Conservation of Music", in the State Department for Sports and the Arts, with the Permanent Presidential Music Commission among its institutions; Executive Order No. 2 of 2023 (November 2023) then moved the music function and the PPMC to the new State Department for Culture, the Arts and Heritage (Republic of Kenya, 2023b, 2023c). Music therefore kept a named function and a named institution in the culture stream across both Orders. The cross-stream point is non-integration rather than absence: the culture stream's

music function and institution have no operational connection to the education stream that would produce musicians. On 2 June 2023 the President announced that the PPMC would be renamed the Permanent Creative Economy Commission, "to bring all arts and music into one ecosystem" (The Star, 2023); the Commission nonetheless still appears under its own name in subsequent official records, an absorption announced but not carried out, which is itself diagnostic of the gap between creative-economy rhetoric and institutional change. Within the education stream, the clearest absorption of the competency-based years is the merger, by Ministry circular of December 2023 and effective from January 2024, of performing arts, visual arts and physical education into a composite Creative Arts and Sports grouping in junior school (Republic of Kenya, 2023d). The Kenya Music Festival, a standing Ministry of Education activity, is an education-stream institution for music, and the 2025 announcement made at it is treated accordingly.

Discussion

Music's position in Kenyan schooling has been shaped less by any explicit decision to diminish it than by the routine operation of curriculum-simplification, competency-reframing and pathway-consolidation agendas, each defensible in its own terms. The cumulative direction, across the five dimensions, has been toward absorption and discontinuity, with one clear countervailing period, the primary-level examinable window of 1985 to 1999. The article therefore does not claim six decades of uninterrupted peripheralisation; it claims a long-run tendency interrupted by partial contact, of which the 1985 window and the 2017 naming of a distinct senior-school music subject are the clearest instances. Three cross-cutting patterns substantiate this. The first is the absorption chain traced in the findings, running from a named examinable primary subject under 8-4-4 to the composite groupings of 2024, with the distinct 2017 senior-school subject as the counter-case that, in Bernstein's terms, strengthens rather than weakens classification. The second is the forty-one-year interval (Figure 2): the College of Performing and Creative Arts recommended in 1984 resurfaces, in comparable institutional language, in the 2025 announcement, measuring how long a culture-stream proposal took to re-enter the education-stream agenda, and spanning the period in which the pipeline Omondi specified was not built. The third is cross-stream non-integration: the education stream folds music into composite subjects while the culture stream keeps a named music function and institution; what neither builds is the bridge between school music and the creative sector. Running through all three is a recurring relation between rhetorical affirmation and structural withdrawal, which, in the 2024 Sessional Paper, takes the form of cultural goals stated with no mention of music at all. These patterns are not unique to Kenya: comparable peripheralisations are documented in the United Kingdom (Ricketts, 2025), South Africa (Carver, 2017) and Ghana at the pedagogy level (Dordzro, 2023). What the Kenyan case adds is documentary clarity, because a dedicated music commission produced a complete programme in 1984 whose uptake can be traced.

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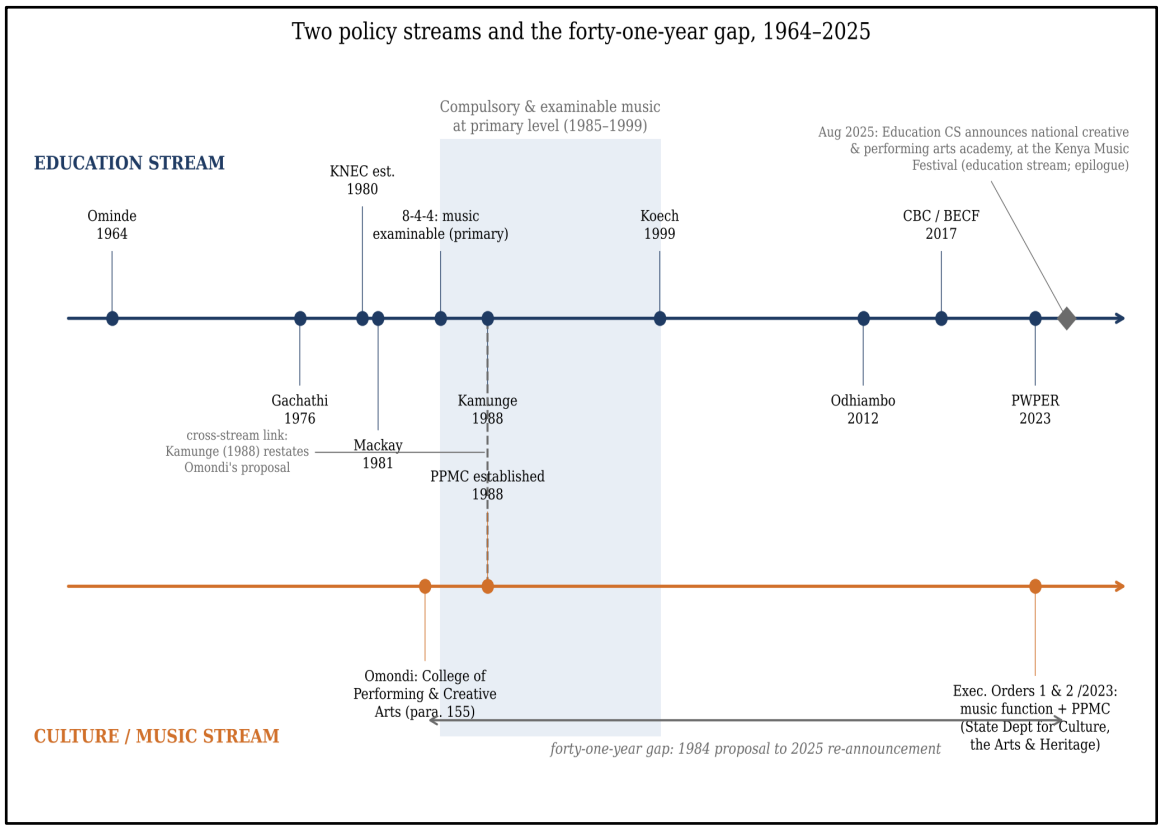


Figure 2: The two policy streams and the forty-one-year gap between the Omondi Commission's recommendation of a College of Performing and Creative Arts (1984) and its re-announcement (2025).

Note: The Permanent Presidential Music Commission (1988) and Executive Orders No. 1 and No. 2 of 2023 are shown on the culture line. KNEC is dated to 1980 and the competency-based framework to 2017. The shaded band marks the primary-level compulsory-examinable window (1985 to 1999). The 2025 announcement was made within the education stream, at the Kenya Music Festival, and lies outside the 1964 to 2023 corpus; it is shown as an epilogue.

The recent reforms sit within the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), whose priorities include a Digital Superhighway and Creative Industry pillar (National Treasury, 2024); the creative sector is therefore a named policy priority. The paradox is not that music is absent from economic policy, but that it is claimed as creative-economy opportunity in the culture stream while the examinable, teacher-supported school music that would supply that economy is not rebuilt in the education stream.

Conclusion

This article set out to explain a forty-one-year interval between the 1984 recommendation of a College of Performing and Creative Arts and a comparable 2025 announcement. Its explanation is that the interval reflects a durable structural condition, bifurcated peripheralisation, and a mechanism within it, peripheralisation by absorption. The framework identifies both, specifies

the five dimensions by which they can be observed, and states the evidence that would count against them. The cultural language of the 2024 Sessional Paper, which names national cultural goals while making no mention of music, is better read as the current form of the condition than as evidence of substantive change, and recognising it as such directs attention to the infrastructural questions, examination status, specialist teacher supply and progression, that determine whether music is sustained. At primary and system level the condition would be shown to be ending, not by stronger rhetoric, but by a universal examinable primary-music subject with continuous progression, a funded expansion of specialist teacher education and a cross-ministry instrument joining the streams; at secondary level, where KCSE Music is examinable and leads to university programmes, that test is closer to being met. For policy, escaping the condition would require a joined-up curriculum-to-career pathway naming its actors, the Ministry of Education, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, the Kenya National Examinations Council, the Teachers Service Commission, the universities and the culture-sector department, with its instruments, sequence and financing. For scholarship, the analysis shows that critical policy discourse analysis, with an explicit silence rule, belongs in the study of African music education. For teacher education, the pipeline failure Omondi diagnosed is where peripheralisation reproduces itself. Naming the condition is a first step toward addressing it. The study is documentary and single-country; several reports were consulted through secondary sources, which constrains what can be claimed about their silences, and the post-2023 developments are treated as context rather than fully analysed objects. The authors are music educators working in Kenyan and South African universities, a standpoint that informs the article's concern with the music pipeline; the five-dimension test and the silence rule are intended in part to discipline that disposition.

Declarations

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