

Between Promise and Pragmatism: Teacher and Student Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence in Secondary School Music Education in Mbarara City, Western Uganda

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly positioned as a transformative force in global education, yet its implications for music education in sub-Saharan African secondary schools remain critically underexplored. This study examined teacher and student perceptions of AI in secondary school music education in Mbarara City, Western Uganda, with particular attention to opportunities, structural constraints, and ethical dimensions. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed across six purposively selected schools two urban modern, two peri-urban, and two remote to capture the full spectrum of resource conditions in the region. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 music teachers (T1–T12) and 6 head teachers (HT1–HT6), four focus group discussions with 60 lower secondary students (FGD-1 to FGD-4), and key informant interviews with 2 curriculum specialists (CS1–CS2) between February and June 2026 (N = 80). Thematic analysis produced three salient themes: guarded optimism about AI's pedagogical affordances, structural and institutional constraints limiting access and implementation, and ethical and cultural tensions arising from concerns about AI's alignment with indigenous Ugandan musical values. Guided by the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Gay's (2010) culturally responsive pedagogy framework, the findings reveal a pronounced digital divide between urban and remote schools and a coherent pattern of principled pragmatism among participants. Ethical concerns centred on cultural authenticity, data bias, and intellectual ownership. The study contributes to the emerging discourse on AI in African music education and offers evidence-based recommendations for policy, practice, and research.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, music education, secondary schools, Uganda, digital divide, culturally responsive pedagogy.*

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