

From Peripheral Participation to Musical Identity: Mentorship and Peer Learning in an Informal Popular Music Band in Kisumu County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examines how mentorship and peer learning shape the learning experiences of musicians in a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, Kenya. While informal music learning remains an important pathway through which many musicians acquire musical knowledge and skills, little is known about how mentorship and peer interactions happen within urban Kenyan popular music bands. Guided by Situated Learning Theory, the study adopted a qualitative case study design. The study collected data through semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and five non-participant observations involving members of a selected popular music band. The findings reveal that mentorship was informal, distributed, and embedded in everyday musical practice, with more experienced members providing guidance through observation, demonstration, correction, and interaction during rehearsals and performances. Peer learning provided a reciprocal process through which members exchanged ideas, solved musical challenges and shared responsibility for ensemble development. The findings further show that musicians described a shift from limited or peripheral participation to increasingly active contribution, accompanied by the development of confidence, belonging, and musical identity. The study concludes that mentorship and reciprocal peer learning are important components of informal music learning, musical development and identity formation within the band. It contributes to scholarship on informal music education by showing how mentorship and reciprocal peer learning support learning, participation, and identity development within a community of practice in an urban music context. The study recommends greater recognition of informal mentorship and peer-learning approaches in music education policy and practice.

Key terms: Communities of practice, informal music learning, mentorship, musical identity, peer learning.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study examines how mentorship and peer learning shape the learning experiences of musicians in a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, Kenya. Although music education in Kenya takes place in both formal and informal settings, limited attention has been given to how musicians develop musical knowledge and skills through contemporary informal learning environments. Formal music education is mainly offered in educational institutions, where learning follows a curriculum and is assessed, while informal learning occurs outside formal classroom structures (Akuno, 2020). In Kenya, informal music learning has long been associated with oral traditions and communal practices, including rituals, rites of passage, and other forms of community participation through which musical knowledge and skills are transmitted (Akuno, 2020). However, less is known about how such informal learning processes operate within contemporary popular music settings, particularly in urban music bands.

In this study, informal music learning refers to the acquisition and development of musical knowledge and skills through participation in rehearsals, performances, observation, imitation, guidance, peer interaction and collaborative musical activities outside formal classroom-based instruction. Such learning may occur without a formally designated teacher, as musicians learn through participation in shared music activities and interaction with other members. Research on popular music learning shows that musicians commonly develop musical knowledge through listening, observation, imitation, experimentation, practice, and interaction with peers (Green 2017, 2016). Thus, informal learning does not necessarily mean the absence of structure; rather, learning can be embedded in the activities and relationships through which musicians participate in musical practice.

Popular music bands provide an important setting for examining these processes. Musicians participate in rehearsals, live performances and everyday interactions in which they observe and imitate more experienced musicians, receive guidance and correction, and practice together in preparation for performances. More experienced members may guide others through demonstration and feedback, while members also exchange ideas, skills, and solutions. These interactions create opportunities for both mentorship and peer learning. While mentorship may involve guidance from members with greater experience or musical knowledge, peer learning involves reciprocal exchange in which members contribute to one another's learning and development.

Despite recognition of informal music learning in music education scholarship, empirical understanding of how mentorship and peer learning operate within contemporary popular music bands in Kenya remains limited. In particular, less is known about how more experienced members guide musicians, how they learn from one another, and how these interactions shape their participation, learning experiences, and development as musicians. This gap matters because popular music bands provide spaces where musicians learn through ongoing participation in authentic musical activities rather than formal classroom instruction.

This study therefore examines how mentorship and peer learning shape musicians' educational experiences within a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, Kenya. Guided by Situated Learning Theory, the study considers how musicians participate in shared musical activities, learn through interaction with others, and develop their roles and identities within the band. The paper reviews literature on mentorship, peer learning, and musical identity formation; outlines the study's

methodology, presents and discusses the findings, and concludes with implications for informal music education.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentorship in Informal Music Learning

Mentorship in a band refers to guidance from a more experienced or knowledgeable member that supports another member's musical development. Musicians may acquire knowledge, skills and professional values outside formal educational settings through mentorship. In informal music learning environments, mentorship often occurs through observation, modelling, demonstration, feedback and collaborative engagement rather than through structured instructional relationships (Goodrich, 2024). Unlike formal teacher-centred approaches, informal mentorship is typically embedded within shared musical practice, where more experienced musicians guide less experienced members through participation in rehearsals and performances.

Mentorship differs from ordinary peer assistance in that it involves experience-based guidance, even when no formal mentor-mentee relationship exists. A musician may provide guidance because of greater experience, particular musical knowledge, or competence in a specific area, while the recipient may have less experience in that area. However, such guidance does not imply a rigid hierarchy, as members may take on different mentoring and learning roles depending on the musical task or situation.

Research indicates that mentorship contributes not only to technical skill development but also to confidence building, artistic growth and professional socialisation. Hallam (2018) argues that mentorship within musical communities enables learners to access practical knowledge that is often difficult to acquire through formal instruction alone. Similarly, Wright (2016) observes that informal music environments often promote democratic participation, where members share leadership and expertise rather than concentrating them in a single authority figure. These studies suggest that mentorship can be informal, embedded in musical activity, and based on experience rather than formal appointment.

Peer Learning and Collaborative Knowledge Construction

Peer learning refers to a reciprocal, collaborative learning process in which participants contribute to one another's learning by exchanging knowledge, ideas, experiences, feedback, and problem-solving. In a band, members may have different levels of experience or expertise, but they can learn as they work together on shared musical tasks. Green (2017) found that popular musicians frequently learn through listening, imitation, experimentation, and collaboration with fellow musicians, rather than relying exclusively on expert instruction; learners develop competence through collective engagement in musical activities and the sharing of ideas, experiences, and feedback.

Wenger (1998) conceptualises such learning environments as communities of practice, where knowledge is constructed through participation in shared activities. Within these communities, learning emerges through interaction and collective problem-solving. Peer learning therefore extends beyond simple information exchange to shared responsibility for improvement. Contemporary research has similarly shown that collaborative learning enhances creativity, problem-solving abilities,

and musical understanding while fostering stronger social bonds among participants (Moore, 2012; Hallam, 2018).

Although research has established the value of peer learning in informal music education, empirical understanding of how reciprocal peer learning operates within contemporary popular music bands in Kenya remains limited. In particular, less is known about how musicians with different experience levels exchange ideas, provide feedback, solve musical problems collectively, and share responsibility for the ensemble's development. This study addresses this gap by examining reciprocal peer learning alongside mentorship within a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, Kenya.

Musical Identity Formation in Communities of Practice

Music learning involves more than acquiring technical skills; it also shapes how individuals perceive themselves as musicians. Wenger (1998) argues that participation in communities of practice contributes to identity formation as learners gradually move from limited forms of participation toward increasingly active participation. Through sustained engagement, individuals develop a sense of belonging, competence, and identity within the community.

Research in informal music education has shown that participation in musical communities influences learners' confidence, self-efficacy, and understanding of their roles as musicians (Green, 2016). As individuals gain experience and recognition from peers, they increasingly view themselves as legitimate contributors to the musical community. This identity-formation process is particularly relevant in informal learning contexts, where learning is closely tied to participation, social interaction, and practical musical engagement.

Communities of practice provide an important context for understanding the relationship between participation, learning, and musical identity. However, empirical understanding remains limited regarding how mentorship and reciprocal peer learning work together to support musicians' movement from peripheral participation toward increasingly active contribution and the development of musical identity within contemporary Kenyan popular music bands. This study addresses this gap by examining these processes within a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Situated Learning Theory (SLT), developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). The theory views learning as a process that occurs through participation in social practices and shared activities rather than solely through the transmission of knowledge from an instructor to a learner. Learning is therefore understood as socially situated and connected to the context in which activities take place. Two concepts from the theory are particularly relevant to this study: community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation.

The concept of community of practice helps explain the selected popular music band as a social and musical environment in which members learn through participation in shared activities. In the band, rehearsals, performances, musical discussions and collaborative problem-solving provide contexts in which musicians interact and develop musical knowledge. This concept therefore provides a basis for examining how mentorship and peer learning are embedded within everyday musical activities rather than organised as formal teaching relationships.

The second relevant concept is legitimate peripheral participation, which explains how newcomers can initially participate in limited but meaningful ways within a community and, through continued engagement, move towards increasingly active participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this study, this concept is used to interpret how musicians initially rely on observation, imitation, and guidance before taking greater responsibility in rehearsals, musical decisions, and performance preparation. It also provides a basis for examining how participation connects to musicians' developing confidence, sense of belonging, and musical identity.

The theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a framework for interpreting learning as part of participation in the band's social and musical life. Rather than treating mentorship and peer learning as separate instructional techniques, SLT allows the study to examine them as processes embedded in a community of practice. Mentorship can be understood as guidance that supports participation, while reciprocal peer learning reflects interaction and knowledge exchange among members engaged in shared musical activities. The concept of legitimate peripheral participation further helps explain changes in members' roles as they move from limited participation towards increasingly active contribution.

Thus, SLT provides the analytical lens through which the study interprets three key aspects of the findings: how mentorship is embedded in everyday musical practice, how peer learning develops through reciprocal participation, and how continued participation is associated with changes in musicians' roles and musical identities. The theory does not assume that participation follows a fixed or automatic progression; instead, it provides a framework for examining how learning, participation, and identity connect within the specific social and musical context of the selected band.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the role of mentorship and peer learning in musicians' educational experiences within a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, Kenya. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to explore participants' lived experiences, interactions, and meanings within a real-life musical context; the case study design enabled an in-depth examination of learning processes occurring within one bounded musical group.

The study was conducted in Kisumu County, Kenya, within a selected established popular music band that regularly rehearsed and performed live. The band was purposively selected because it provided a suitable context for examining informal mentorship, peer learning and participation in everyday musical practice. Selection criteria included regular live performance, an established history of musical activity, members with different levels of musical experience, opportunities for mentorship and peer interaction, and participation in diverse musical roles. These characteristics provided a context in which the study could examine informal learning and interaction within cultural musical activities.

The study involved ten band members representing different musical roles. Participants were included because they were active band members directly involved in rehearsals and live performances, providing firsthand experience of the mentorship and peer learning practices. The band comprised two lead vocalists, two backup vocalists, two guitarists, one bassist, one keyboardist, one drummer, and

one saxophonist. Purposive sampling was used to select the band based on established criteria, while all ten members of the selected band participated in the study.

Data were generated through three qualitative methods: ten semi-structured interviews, one focus group discussion (FGD) involving the same ten participants, and five non-participant observation sessions, including two rehearsals and three live performances. The same participants took part in both the individual interviews and the FGD because the two methods served complementary purposes. The interviews gave participants opportunities to describe their individual experiences of mentorship, peer learning, participation, and musical development in greater depth. At the same time, the FGD explored shared experiences, collective reflections, and areas of agreement or difference among band members.

Semi-structured interviews focused on participants' experiences of receiving and providing guidance, learning from other members, participating in rehearsals and performances, and changes in their musical roles and experiences over time. The FGD explored how members understood learning, mentorship, peer interaction and collective musical development within the band.

The researcher conducted non-participant observations during two rehearsals and three live performances. The researcher observed interactions among members, demonstrations and corrections, peer exchanges, rehearsals, musical decision-making, and participation during performances. The researcher recorded observation data as field notes during and immediately after each session, focusing on the specific musical and social activities relevant to the study. The field notes were organised by observation session and activity, then compared with interview and FGD data during analysis. Observation data corroborated, contextualised, and identified similarities or differences in participants' accounts of mentorship, peer learning, and participation.

Interviews and FGD recordings were transcribed verbatim and, together with the observational field notes, analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. The analysis involved familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. I read observation field notes alongside the interview and FGD transcripts and coded them according to relevant patterns of mentorship, peer interaction, participation, and identity development. I compared the three data sources throughout the analysis to strengthen interpretation and provide a more comprehensive account of the learning processes within the band.

Themes were developed inductively from participants' experiences and observed practices, and interpreted through the concepts of Situated Learning Theory. The final three themes were: Mentorship as socially embedded guidance, reciprocal peer learning and knowledge exchange, and gradual role transition and identity development.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Kabarak University Research Ethics Committee (KUREC) and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). We obtained written informed consent from all participants before data collection. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and measures taken to ensure confidentiality and

anonymity. Pseudonyms were used when reporting findings. The researcher stored research data on password-protected computers and in locked cabinets, with access restricted to the researcher.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis generated three interrelated themes that explain how mentorship and peer learning shaped musicians' educational experiences within the selected popular music band.

Table 1: Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Mentorship as Socially Embedded Guidance	Modelling and demonstration; Real-time correction; Informal scaffolding
Reciprocal Peer Learning and Knowledge Exchange	Mutual idea sharing; Collective problem-solving; Shared responsibility for improvement
Gradual Role Transition and Identity Development	Movement from peripheral participation to active contribution; Development of confidence and musical identity

As shown in Table 1, mentorship and peer learning operated through socially embedded guidance, reciprocal peer learning and knowledge exchange, and gradual role transition and identity development.

Theme 1: Mentorship as Socially Embedded Guidance

Mentorship within the selected popular music band was informal, relational, and embedded in everyday musical practice rather than organised through formal instructional structures. More experienced members primarily provided guidance by observing, demonstrating, correcting, and interacting through rehearsal. The findings also showed that mentorship was not a fixed hierarchical arrangement but a fluid process shaped by musical competence, experience, and participation in shared activities.

Participants described learning by observing experienced musicians and modelling their actions during rehearsals and performances. One participant explained:

"When I joined, I used to follow what he was doing because he had more experience." (P2)

Similarly, another participant noted:

"He showed me how to handle certain transitions." (P8)

These accounts indicate that participants acquired musical knowledge through observation and demonstration within ongoing musical activities. Rather than receiving instruction through designated teaching sessions, less experienced members learned by watching and applying what more experienced members demonstrated.

This pattern was also evident in the focus group discussion, where participants indicated that members with greater expertise guided in particular situations. One participant remarked:

"If someone knows something better, they help the others." (FGD)

Observation data supported these accounts. During rehearsals, more experienced musicians were observed demonstrating musical passages, correcting mistakes, and providing immediate feedback before the group repeated sections collectively. Such interactions occurred within the normal flow of rehearsal rather than through designated teaching sessions.

Taken together, the interview, focus group and observation data show that mentorship was embedded in the bands' everyday musical activities. This finding is consistent with Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), which views learning as occurring through participation in social and practice-based contexts. In the present study, less experienced members learned through interaction with more experienced musicians while participating in shared musical activities. The findings therefore suggest that mentorship operated through participation and guided engagement rather than formal instruction.

Hallam (2018) similarly observes that mentorship in informal music settings may occur through modelling, demonstration, and shared practice rather than formal pedagogical structures. Recent research also highlights the role of peer mentoring and collaborative learning in promoting knowledge exchange and shared responsibility among musicians (Fernández-Barros et al., 2022; Goodrich, 2024). In the present study, however, guidance was not restricted to a formally designated mentor. Instead, members with relevant musical competence assisted when particular musical needs arose.

A further finding concerned the relationship between leadership and mentorship. Participants described leadership primarily as musical coordination rather than formal teaching authority. One participant explained:

"He just guides us on how the song should go." (P3)

Another stated:

"It's not like someone is the teacher. We just have someone who coordinates." (P6)

These accounts suggest that leadership and mentorship were closely interconnected, but leadership did not necessarily establish a formal teacher-learner relationship. Instead, guidance was linked to musical competence and the group's needs. This supports the view that learning within the band was socially organised and distributed among members rather than controlled through a fixed instructional hierarchy.

Overall, the findings show that mentorship within the band functioned as a socially embedded process of guidance, modelling, and support. Through everyday musical interaction, experienced members facilitated the learning of less experienced members while maintaining collaborative relationships that encouraged participation, confidence and musical development.

Theme 2: Reciprocal Peer Learning and Knowledge Exchange

Beyond mentorship from more experienced members, the findings revealed that learning within the selected popular music band was deeply collaborative and reciprocal. Knowledge did not flow exclusively from more experienced musicians to newer members; rather, band members continuously exchanged ideas, offered feedback, and contributed to musical development. Peer learning emerged as a central mechanism through which musicians refined performance skills, addressed musical challenges, and strengthened ensemble cohesion.

Participants described rehearsals as spaces where they shared ideas and collectively negotiated musical decisions. One participant explained:

"We share ideas when rehearsing and see what works best."(P4)

Another participant observed:

"Sometimes someone suggests something small and it changes the whole sound."(P9)

These accounts show that members were not only receiving guidance but were also contributing ideas to the group's musical processes. During the focus group discussion, participants similarly emphasised the collective nature of learning within the band:

"Everybody contributes something."(FGD)

Observation data reinforced these accounts. Rehearsals involved discussions about song arrangements, transitions, and performance strategies, followed by attempts to test and refine different ideas. Members were observed suggesting alternatives, trying them out, and collectively evaluating the skills before agreeing on an approach. The observations therefore showed that musical knowledge and decision-making were distributed across the ensemble rather than concentrated in particular members.

Taken together, the interview, focus group, and observation data indicate that peer learning functioned as a process of collective knowledge construction. Members participated in generating, testing and refining musical ideas rather than simply receiving information. This finding aligns with Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, in which learning develops through participation in shared activities. It also supports Green's (2017) observation that popular musicians frequently learn through collaboration, listening, experimentation, and peer interaction.

Peer learning also involved shared responsibility for group improvement. Participants recognised that individual preparation and performance directly affected the whole ensemble. One participant remarked:

"If one person is not ready, it affects everyone."(P6)

Another explained:

"We push each other to practice so that we don't disappoint as a group."(P8)

The focus group discussion similarly reflected this collective orientation: "We want the band to grow, not just ourselves." (FGD)

Observation data supported these perspectives. Members were observed working collectively on difficult sections, while corrections generally focused on improving overall ensemble performance rather than simply identifying individual mistakes. These findings suggest that reciprocal peer learning also created opportunities for members with initially limited or peripheral participation to become more actively involved in the band's musical activities. As members shared ideas, responded to suggestions, and participated in collective problem-solving, they had opportunities to contribute to musical decisions and take greater responsibility within the ensemble. The process was not necessarily linear, but continued participation gave members opportunities to move from primarily following or receiving guidance to making suggestions and contributing to musical decisions.

This interpretation is consistent with Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), particularly the concept of legitimate peripheral participation. Within the selected band, participation in shared musical activities gave members opportunities to develop competence while becoming increasingly involved in the band's musical processes. Peer learning therefore complemented mentorship: while experienced members provided guidance when needed, reciprocal interaction enabled members to contribute their own ideas and knowledge. In this way, peer learning supported increasing participation and created conditions through which musicians could develop a stronger sense of competence, belonging, and ownership of their musical contributions.

Thus, peer learning extended beyond acquiring musical skills to include mutual accountability, cooperation, and shared ownership of musical outcomes. Unlike mentorship, which often involved guidance from more experienced members, peer learning involved more reciprocal exchange among members. Through this exchange, musicians contributed to one another's learning while taking increasing responsibility for the ensemble's development. These experiences provided a foundation for developing musical identity, which the next theme examines further.

Theme 3: Gradual Role Transition and Identity Development

The findings revealed that mentorship and peer learning within the selected popular music band contributed not only to skill development but also to changes in members' roles, confidence, and sense of musical identity. Through guidance from more experienced members and reciprocal interaction with peers, musicians gained opportunities to participate more actively in rehearsals, performances, and musical decision-making. The findings therefore showed a gradual movement from limited or peripheral participation toward increasingly active contribution within the musical community.

Participants described joining the band as a period characterised by observation, imitation, and limited participation. One participant explained:

"When I joined, I was just following what others were doing." (P5)

This account shows how newcomers initially participated in limited ways while learning the group's musical expectations and practices. Mentorship guided this stage, while participation in shared activities created opportunities to observe and learn from other members.

Over time, however, participants described changes in their level of participation. The same participant later stated:

"Now I can suggest things during rehearsal." (P5)

Similarly, another participant noted:

"At first, you just fit in, then later you become part of shaping the sound." (P4)

These accounts indicate increased involvement in the band's musical processes. Members who initially relied more on observation and guidance began contributing ideas, participating in musical decisions and taking greater responsibility within the ensemble. Thus, mentorship and peer learning gave members opportunities to build competence while becoming more actively involved in shared musical practices.

The focus group discussion reinforced this finding. One participant remarked:

"Everyone here has grown from where they started." (FGD)

Observation data also supported these accounts. Members who initially appeared reserved during rehearsals were later observed initiating cues, proposing musical ideas, and taking active roles in performance preparation. Participation was therefore not static; continued engagement in the band's activities gave members opportunities to increase their contribution and responsibility.

These findings are consistent with Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), particularly the concept of legitimate peripheral participation. The theory explains how newcomers participate in limited but meaningful ways within a community of practice while developing competence through continued engagement. In the present study, mentorship and peer learning provided practical means for members to participate in shared musical activities, acquire knowledge, and increase their involvement. The findings do not suggest a fixed or automatic progression; rather, they show that continued participation created opportunities for increasingly active contribution.

Beyond changes in participation, the findings revealed the development of confidence, belonging and musical identity. Participants described changes in how they perceived themselves as musicians and band members. One participant stated:

"Being in this band has changed how I see myself as a musician." (P9)

Another explained:

"Now I feel like I really belong here."(P5)

These accounts indicate that participation mattered beyond acquiring musical skills. As members contributed to rehearsals, performances and musical decisions, they developed greater confidence, belonging, and recognition of themselves as musicians within the group.

The focus group discussions similarly reflected this collective development: "We have grown together." (FGD)

Observation data further supported these accounts. During performances, members displayed confidence, ownership of musical space, and increased interaction with audiences and fellow musicians. These observations provided behavioural evidence of the changes participants described in relation to confidence, participation and belonging.

The findings support Wenger's (1998) argument that participation in communities of practice is closely connected to identity formation, as individuals develop competence and belonging through engagement in shared practices. They also resonate with Green's (2016) observation that informal music learning environments can support personal growth and confidence through active engagement in musical activities.

A key contribution of this study is demonstrating how mentorship and peer learning worked together in the identity development of musicians within the selected popular music band. Mentorship provided guidance and modelling, while reciprocal peer learning created opportunities for members to contribute ideas, solve musical challenges, and share responsibility. These forms of participation enabled musicians to move from more limited participation to increasingly active contribution. As participation increased, participants described greater confidence, belonging and changes in how they viewed themselves as musicians.

Overall, the three themes demonstrate that mentorship and peer learning were informal but not unstructured. Mentorship provided socially embedded guidance, while peer learning enabled reciprocal knowledge exchange and shared responsibility. Together, these processes created opportunities for increasing participation and contributed to musicians' confidence, sense of belonging, and musical identity within the band.

Discussion

The findings suggest that informal music learning in the selected band is best understood as a socially situated process in which mentorship and peer learning work together rather than as separate forms of instruction. This finding shows that musical learning was not confined to transferring technical knowledge from experienced to less experienced musicians. Instead, learning was embedded in participation in rehearsals, performances, decision-making, and everyday interaction. This extends the understanding of informal music learning by showing that a band's educational value lies not only in what musicians learn, but also in how participation creates opportunities to contribute, negotiate meaning, and develop a sense of belonging.

The mentorship observed in the study aligns with Hallam's (2018) view that informal music learning can involve practice-based guidance rather than formal instructional structures. However, the present findings add that mentorship may be distributed across members according to musical competence and the immediate needs of the activity. This challenges the idea that mentorship necessarily involves one fixed mentor and one learner. In this band, leadership and mentorship could overlap, but musical coordination did not establish a rigid teacher-learner hierarchy. This suggests that informal music learning environments can offer flexible forms of expertise, where different members can serve as sources of guidance at different times.

The reciprocal nature of peer learning further develops this understanding. Green (2017) identifies listening, imitation, experimentation and peer interaction as important features of popular musicians' learning. The present study similarly found these processes, but also indicates that peer learning in a band is not simply an alternative way of acquiring musical skills; it can also develop musicians' capacity to negotiate ideas, respond to others and contribute to collective musical goals. The finding therefore broadens the educational significance of peer learning from individual skill acquisition to collaborative music practice.

Situated Learning Theory provides a useful explanation for the relationship between these processes. Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation helps explain why participation itself became an important mechanism of learning. Musicians initially engaged in more limited ways and, through continued involvement and interaction, had opportunities to contribute more actively. This study's theoretical insight is that mentorship and peer learning can be understood as mechanisms that support participation within a community of practice. Mentorship provides access to knowledge and guidance, while peer learning creates opportunities for members to exercise and contribute their developing knowledge. Participation thus becomes both a means of learning and a context for developing musical identity.

The relationship between participation and identity is particularly significant. Wenger (1998) argues that identity develops through participation in communities of practice, and these findings support that connection. However, this study also shows that musical identity in an informal band is connected to opportunities for recognition and contribution. As musicians moved from primarily following others to suggesting ideas and taking greater responsibility, they not only developed competence but also came to see themselves as legitimate contributors to the musical community. This offers a useful perspective on musical identity as something developed through participation and social recognition rather than solely through individual musical ability.

An important finding is that mentorship did not appear to reduce peer learning or create dependence on particular individuals. Instead, guidance from experienced members and reciprocal exchange among peers operated alongside one another. This is significant because it suggests that informal learning can combine structured elements of expertise with flexible and reciprocal participation without becoming formal instruction. The findings therefore provide a more nuanced understanding of how learning can be organised within popular music bands.

The study also contributes a context-specific perspective to scholarship on informal music learning. Much of the established literature on popular music learning has been developed outside the Kenyan

context (Green, 2002, 2016; Hallam, 2018). The present study shows how similar principles of collaborative and situated learning operate within a selected popular music band in Kisumu County, while also demonstrating that the specific forms of mentorship, peer interaction, leadership and participation are shaped by the band's own musical and social practices. These findings therefore support the relevance of situated learning for understanding informal music learning while avoiding the assumption that all communities of practice operate in the same way.

Overall, the findings indicate that mentorship and peer learning should be understood as interconnected processes through which musicians gain access to musical knowledge, participate in shared practice and develop recognition as contributors to the musical community. Their educational significance extends beyond technical competence to include participation, collaboration, belonging and musical identity. This has implications for music education by highlighting the educational value of informal musical communities and the need to recognise learning that occurs through participation, mentorship and peer collaboration outside conventional classroom structures.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to one popular music band in Kisumu County and therefore does not seek to represent all popular music bands or informal music-learning contexts in Kenya. The findings reflect the experiences and practices of the ten members of the selected band. In addition, the study relied on qualitative interviews, one focus group discussion, and five observation sessions, meaning the findings reflect the period and context in which the data were collected. Nevertheless, the study provides an in-depth account of mentorship and peer learning within a bounded musical community. It offers insights that may inform further research in other popular music settings.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that mentorship and reciprocal peer learning were important components of informal music learning within the selected popular music band. Their significance extended beyond acquiring musical skills, as participation in shared musical practices also supported musicians' confidence, belonging, and the development of musical identities. The study further concludes that mentorship and peer learning operated as interconnected processes within the band's community of practice. Mentorship provided flexible, experience-based guidance, while peer learning created opportunities for members to exchange knowledge, contribute ideas and share responsibility. Together, these processes created opportunities for musicians to participate increasingly actively in the musical community.

The study contributes to understanding informal music learning in the Kenyan context by demonstrating how learning, participation and identity can develop through everyday musical interaction outside formal instructional settings. It therefore highlights popular music bands as meaningful spaces for collaborative learning and musical development.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the study recommends that music educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers recognise mentorship and peer learning as valuable approaches to music learning beyond formal classroom instruction. Music programmes in schools and community settings could offer opportunities for learners to work in small ensembles, engage in peer feedback,

and participate in collaborative rehearsals, with the teacher or facilitator supporting rather than directing every aspect of the learning process.

Community music groups, performing ensembles, and cultural organisations should also intentionally create environments that support interaction between more experienced and emerging musicians. However, the findings suggest that such mentorship should remain flexible and connected to actual musical activities rather than relying on rigid mentor-mentee structures. Mentorship can support not only musical skill development but also rehearsal discipline, stage behaviour, confidence, professional socialisation, and musical identity.

Music education institutions could further strengthen links between formal education and community-based music groups. Partnerships within schools, universities and active musical ensembles could give learners opportunities to participate in rehearsals, performances, and other authentic musical activities. Such experiences would help learners develop musical skills and confidence by participating in real musical communities.

Further research should examine mentorship and peer learning across multiple popular music bands and regions in Kenya to determine whether the patterns identified in this study occur in other musical contexts. Comparative studies could also investigate how genre, gender, ensemble structure, experience and professional status influence participation, peer learning, mentorship, and musical identity. Longitudinal research could further examine how musicians' participation and identities develop over time.

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