

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF PEOPLE AND MUSIC: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED YORUBA MUSIC

Shyngle Kolawole BALOGUN,^{1#} Seun AKINTARO², Olufuwafunmilayo Adedoyin OYINLOLA³ and
Opeyemi ADEGBOSIN²

1. Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
2. Department of English and Literary Studies, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Ogbomoso, Nigeria
3. Department of Psychology, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH) Ogbomoso, Nigeria

#Corresponding Author: S.K.Balogun,
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jolls.v14i4.6>

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between psychological well-being and music through a pragmatic analysis of selected Yoruba songs. Grounded in Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory, the research explores how music operates as a communicative act that consoles, advises, motivates, and regulates social behaviour within specific cultural contexts. Using purposive sampling, songs from Beautiful Nubia (*Seven Lives*, 1997; *Kurunmi*, 2017), Ebenezer Obey (*Aimasiko*, 1987; *The Man, the Horse and the Son*, 2006), and King Sunny Adé (*The Good Shepherd*, 1989; *Authority*, 1990) were analysed for their pragmatic functions and psychological implications. Findings reveal that Yoruba music serves as a psycho-therapeutic discourse that addresses anxiety, grief, uncertainty, and social pressure, while simultaneously fostering resilience, patience, hope, and spiritual reassurance. The analysis highlights how metaphor, presupposition, reference, and speech acts embedded in the lyrics function as tools for stress relief, moral guidance, identity reinforcement, and communal healing. For instance, Beautiful Nubia employs metaphor and cultural reference to instill hope and resilience, Obey uses proverbial wisdom to emphasize patience and authenticity, while Sunny Adé integrates spiritual imagery to provide comfort and faith-based assurance. Together, these artists demonstrate the enduring role of Yoruba music as a cultural medium that bridges entertainment, therapy, and social regulation. The study concludes that Yoruba music is not only an artistic expression but also a pragmatic instrument that contributes significantly to emotional balance, mental health, and collective well-being. These findings underscore the importance of indigenous music as a vital resource for psychological wellness in contemporary society.

Keywords: Psychological wellbeing, Pragmatics, Yoruba music, Emotional balance

Word count: 247

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1948: 100) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" This definition seems not far-fetched from the construct of psychological wellbeing. Psychological well-being is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional construct that encompasses an individual's overall

happiness, satisfaction with life, and mental and emotional health. It includes key components such as positive emotions, autonomy, positive relationships, low levels of negative emotions, purpose in life, life satisfaction, and personal growth (Dhanabhakym & Sarath, 2023).

The characteristics of music, such as genre, familiarity, and tempo, have been widely investigated in relation to their influence on human

cognition, behaviour, and psychological wellbeing. For example, it has been suggested that low-information music produces optimal arousal levels for task performance, as it creates sufficient stimulation without overburdening cognitive resources (Kiger, 1989). Conversely, research by Wolf and Weiner (1972) revealed that unfamiliar sounds tend to be more distracting than familiar ones, thereby interfering with concentration and reducing efficiency in task execution. Beyond familiarity, scholars have also examined the combined influence of music type, individual personality differences, and task context. Cassidy and McDonald (2007), for instance, explored how students classified as extroverts and introverts responded to different auditory conditions: high-arousal and low-affect music, low-arousal and positive-affect music, and basic background noise. Their findings demonstrated that performance declined in the presence of any background sound, whether music or noise, compared to silence. Furthermore, exposure to high-arousal music was found to be particularly detrimental, resulting in poorer recall and cognitive task performance compared to conditions involving low-arousal music or background noise.

Another crucial dimension of music's impact on behaviour and wellbeing lies in its genre and the language in which it is performed. These two characteristics: genre preference and linguistic familiarity, significantly shape the emotional and cognitive benefits derived from music (Balogun et al., 2013; 2022; 2023). Balogun et al. (2022) reported gendered differences in task performance depending on music genre: males performed better when listening to Fuji music, while females outperformed males when listening to gospel music. This finding suggests that music preference and cultural orientation can moderate the effectiveness of music as a facilitator of performance. Similarly, Balogun et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of linguistic familiarity, showing that individuals tend to perform better on cognitive tasks when the music is rendered in their native language rather than a foreign one. For instance, Botswana indigenes demonstrated enhanced task performance when listening to music in *Satswana* (their local

language) compared to music performed in French or English. These findings underscore the interplay between cultural identity, linguistic connection, and musical preference, emphasizing that music's role in psychological wellbeing and behavioural regulation is not universal but rather contextually bound.

Dimensions of Psychological wellbeing and Music

Listening to or performing music fosters self-reflection and emotional expression, allowing individuals to confront and accept their emotions. Music therapy, for example, helps people process negative feelings and build self-acceptance by validating their inner experiences through sound and rhythm. The dimensions are thus reviewed below:

Physical health and music: Music benefits physical health by improving cardiovascular function (lowering blood pressure and heart rate), enhancing mood and motivation for exercise, reducing fatigue and pain perception, and boosting coordination and balance. *For example, Terry et al (2020) reported that exercise enthusiasts have long known that music enhances their physical performance. It was confirmed that working out with music improves your mood, helps your body exercise more efficiently, and cuts down on your awareness of exertion. Working out with music also leads to longer workouts. From another (yet similar) perspective, 9ice and Wasiu Ayinde Marshal (two popular Nigerian musicians), through their single track song 'Ilera loro (health is wealth)', informed Nigerians about the need to take healthcare seriously. Channeling this information through music is relevant because music is universal. Hence, 9ice and Wasiu Ayinde Marshal, in their lyrics believe Nigerians should not only rely on traditional medicine but always keep tabs with certified medical doctors whose diagnosis and treatment are considered valued.*

Anxiety and Music: Sometimes we all experience moments of anxiety about or for one thing or the other. When we are anxious, a lot of cortisol is released into our body system thereby raising our blood pressure and stress hormones. However, one source of mitigating against this is through music (Ferraro, 2021). As a way of using

music to suppress anxiety, Johnny Drille, in one of his records titled “How are you my friend?” encourages his listeners about the need not to be worrisome because of being neglected. The central theme is reaching out to a friend, checking in on their wellbeing, and reassuring them that they are remembered. The song buttresses that there will surely be someone who cares even when those around you seem not to care. Johnny Drille highlights how people often drift apart due to life’s pressures, yet bonds of friendship remain strong. This nostalgia evokes warmth and emotional reassurance.

Music can improve cognitive benefit: Music can increase cognitive functioning, particularly memory, attention, and spatial-temporal abilities (Gupta et al., 2018). Music has therapeutic applications, including mental health treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care (Aluede et al., 2023). Music provides a relaxing comfort to kings of diverse tribes. According to the Bible, David was engaged to play the harp for King Saul. The calming tune of the music provided psychological relief for the King, making him feel better and alleviating his dread and depression (1 Sam 16:23).

Life Goals and Music: Music can assist in planning one’s life goals and achievement, Music sometimes reminds us of our responsibilities, our past and plan for our future. Music is indeed motivational because songs about achieving goals offer powerful motivation. No wonder Saheed Osupa in his song says:

*sare o, ko ma ba waye lasan,
ranti o pe Olorun o da e lasan,
ma duro, aye gan o duro lasan...*

(continue to strive, so you don’t live a fruitless life,)
(remember God has not created you without a purpose,)
(don’t be complacent, life itself doesn’t wait for anyone.)

This music excerpt is a catalyst to remind us of the need to keep hopes alive and never be tired of pushing forward to achieve one’s goal. Life Tree Planners (2025) writes that “Beautiful songs help you reflect on your past but focus on your future. When you feel low, music gives you rest and strength. It keeps you on course toward your goals, making sure you stand tall and keep going. Hence, songs about achieving goals offer powerful motivation.

Love and Music: Music and love are natural allies. Love can result in joy, sorrow, serenity, or exultation, and music is a natural expression of these feelings. Explore some of the ways people have connected with love through music (Smithsonian Music, 2025). Hendrix (2020) once wrote that “After having a long stressful day, the best feeling is coming home and getting in the bed with the coziest blanket and being able to listen to a playlist that can take you through all the emotions good and bad....That’s why music is the ultimate love language. Music has gotten me through some really dark times and listening to the perfect playlist can help you get through whatever you are going through. Emotions are like a rollercoaster and music can join you for the ride”.

In contrast, when using music to communicate, the two people involved would have added artistic elements that they can use. These include rhythm, dynamics, harmonic backdrop, expression and pitch to tune in to what the other is communicating. It is by enabling the human brain and ears to focus closely on added stimuli that the brains of the two individuals communicating via music begin to fire symmetrically. Thus, the interaction using music is a closer and more intimate one making it the real language of love (John, 2023).

Music and love have always shared a powerful connection. You can use music to improve your health and psychological wellbeing. This is because music makes you happy and even elated. The emotions generated increase the diameter of the blood vessels, which is good for an individual’s vascular health (Karin, 2025). This is evident in Beautiful Nubia’s songs such as “What a feeling”, “Awero”, and “Ololufe”.

Emotional State (Loss of significant others) and Music: Loss of a loved one can be very traumatic for someone with overwhelming confusion, shared memories and so on, and when this happens, music can assist in coping or overcoming this sorrowful

experience. Whether in lyrics, rhythm or the symphony no matter the genre. According to Saint Diamonds (2024) “Music has an extraordinary ability to connect with our emotions, making it a powerful tool in the grieving process. When words fail to express the depth of our sorrow, a song can capture the feelings we struggle to articulate” We can find a connect, and eventually healing, through the rhythm and melody, which helps us remember the times we had, validates our grief, and gently guides us toward acceptance and peace (Saint Diamonds (2024). Saint Diamonds went further to say that “Music has the power to transport us back in time. It triggers memories and emotions in ways few other mediums can. Celebrating a loved one with a playlist keeps their memory alive and helps us connect with our feelings, whether through tears, laughter, or quiet reflection”. The last track of Yinka Ayefele’s “Life After Death” corroborate this dynamism of music.

Happiness and Music: There is a connection between music and the level of happiness experienced by individuals. According to Tu & Fu (2024), music actually enhances one’s subjective wellbeing. Previous studies have consistently indicated that music can play a beneficial role in enhancing mental well-being. This effect is largely attributed to music’s unique ability to convey and regulate emotions, facilitate personal expression and self-development, and offer a form of psychological escapism or a mental break from daily stressors (Leung and Cheung 2020; Perkins et al. 2020; Fu and Tu 2023). Through both active engagement (e.g., playing an instrument, singing) and passive listening, individuals often use music as a tool for emotional coping, identity exploration, and mood enhancement. This perspective of music is evident in Adewale Ayuba’s song where he says:

*We are happy people, we make you
happy. We are H.A.P.P.Y, P.E.O.P.L.E;
We are happy people, we make you
happy.*

At the neural level, the impact of music on mental health becomes even more evident. Neuroimaging and neurochemical studies have demonstrated that music activates the brain’s reward circuitry,

particularly areas such as the nucleus accumbens and ventral tegmental area, which are strongly linked to the release of dopamine; a neurotransmitter closely associated with feelings of pleasure and motivation (Koelsch 2014; Vuust et al. 2022). This neurochemical response helps explain why music can evoke such strong emotional experiences and why it often contributes to improved mood and increased feelings of happiness. Moreover, the emotional benefits of music appear to extend beyond mood enhancement to physiological responses. Research has shown that positive emotions elicited by music can modulate pain perception, effectively reducing the experience of physical discomfort. For instance, studies suggest that music-induced pleasure can activate endogenous opioid systems, which help suppress pain signals in the brain (Cheng et al. 2017). This suggests that music not only uplifts the mind but can also serve as a form of emotional analgesia. Taken together, this growing body of evidence from neuroscience and psychology highlights music’s powerful and multifaceted contributions to subjective well-being. It underscores music’s potential as an accessible, non-invasive intervention for promoting mental health and improving quality of life across various populations. In essence, music enhances social connections in communities and can foster community bonding and happiness, thereby giving a sense of belonging to individuals in the community (Aluede et al., 2023). In Africa, specific music is usually common to a particular sect or ethno-group, which reminds them of their heritage and where they come from. Fuji music, Juju music, omele sakara, and dadakuada are examples of music that connect people to their roots (Aluede et al., 2023).

Task performance and Music: Studies (such as Balogun et al 2013, 2023) have reported correlation between productivity (task performance) and music. Music is said to help focus, concentrate especially slow paced, slow tempo music (Levine Music, 2023). This view was confirmed by Balogun et al (2013) when they found that music, music genre and language used enhanced task performance (cognitive task) among selected University of Botswana students.

This was also confirmed by Balogun et al (2022, 2023) in their study which focused on students of a private university in Nigeria.

Unemployment or loss of Job: When one is out of job, it can be psychologically debilitating. There is loss of self-esteem, paranoia, fear and even suicidal ideation. Wani and Ahmed (2024) reported that unemployment causes youth to feel worthless, lose self-identity, feel shame, and experience stress. These are all symptoms of psychosocial ill-health. Notwithstanding, listening to some selected Yoruba songs such as Ebenezer Obey's *Evergreen Vol2*, Orlando Owoh's *E get as E be*, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister's *Reality and Questionnaire* etc. are sources of emotional strength to individuals who just lost their jobs.

Pragmatics of Music

The concept of *pragmatics* within the field of linguistics refers to the study of how contextual factors influence the interpretation of meaning in communication. It extends beyond the literal or surface-level meaning of words to encompass how meaning is inferred based on various types of context; namely, socio-cultural, situational, and linguistic (Mey, 2001). These contexts are essential variables that help decode speaker intention, which is at the heart of pragmatic analysis. In this regard, communication is not merely a transfer of linguistic symbols, but a dynamic and contextually grounded process of meaning-making.

Building on this understanding, Akintaro et al. (2025:6) define music as an *artistic tool embedded with diverse pragmatic acts* aimed at addressing societal issues that affect individuals. This definition foregrounds the idea that music, much like spoken or written discourse, is a medium through which intentional communicative acts are performed. In other words, music is not merely for entertainment or aesthetic appreciation; it serves as a platform for conveying messages, evoking emotions, and negotiating meaning through carefully crafted lyrics and musical compositions. The musician becomes both a linguistic and artistic agent, combining tonal elements and verbal expressions to produce meaning-rich content that resonates with an audience. Consequently, music and language can

be viewed as universal human faculties, each with notable similarities in terms of their acoustic structures, cognitive processing, and social functionality (Brown & Jordania, 2013). These shared features justify a deeper scholarly inquiry into music not just as an artistic phenomenon, but also as a linguistic one. It follows, therefore, that music functions as an artistic channel through which pragmatic acts are performed, particularly those that address pressing social, cultural, and psychological concerns within a community.

Pragmatic acts, as defined by Mey (2001), are the communicative actions inferred from a speaker's (or in this case, a singer's) utterances. These acts may include, but are not limited to, informing, warning, advising, persuading, comforting, entertaining, and offering hope. Given that music is predominantly conveyed through language (whether spoken, sung, or chanted), it becomes a viable platform for performing these speech acts. Importantly, the meaning extracted from musical lyrics and performances is rarely self-contained. Instead, meaning is dynamically co-constructed by listeners based on an interplay of linguistic content, musical form, and contextual factors. These factors include the cultural background of the audience, the socio-political climate, the identity of the artist, and the particular situation in which the music is consumed. This focus on the interaction between linguistic choices and contextual cues allows for a more nuanced understanding of music as a communicative act with social and psychological implications.

Despite this, many existing linguistic studies of music have prioritized stylistic analysis, critical discourse studies, and comparative frameworks. While these methodologies offer valuable insights, they often neglect the pragmatic functions of musical discourse, especially how music operates as a therapeutic medium for emotional expression and social commentary. For instance, Oikelome (2012) undertakes a stylistic analysis of Nigerian hip-hop music, specifically exploring the works of Innocent Ujah Idibia (2Face). His study emphasizes how the fusion of African and Western musical elements creates a distinctive musical identity. However, the analysis remains largely descriptive, focusing on melody,

rhythm, harmony, and form, illustrated through conventional musical notation, with limited attention to the pragmatic functions of the lyrics or their communicative intent.

Similarly, Mosobalaje's (2018) study titled *Textual Migration in Ebenezer Obey's Juju Musics* focuses on the phenomenon of textual migration, the adaptation and re-use of lyrical content across musical performances. Rooted in Yoruba oral traditions, this process highlights a fluid approach to authorship and textuality. Yet, even this culturally rich analysis does not engage deeply with how these migrated texts perform pragmatic acts within new contexts or how they affect listener interpretation. Another relevant contribution is that of Ibitayo and Olusegun (2020), who examine the socialization functions of Saheed Osupa's songs within Yoruba cultural settings using a content exploration methodology. While the study alludes to the role of music in social communication, it does not explicitly address how pragmatic strategies embedded in the lyrics serve therapeutic or psychological purposes. Furthermore, the study by Akintaro et al. (2025) on Yinka Ayefele focuses primarily on the emotive relevance of his music. While this highlights the affective dimension of music, it does not fully consider its psychological impact or the specific pragmatic acts that structure his lyrical content.

These studies collectively highlight a significant gap in the literature: the underexplored pragmatic dimension of music, particularly how it functions as a therapeutic and communicative medium. Music does not merely entertain; it persuades, instructs, consoles, and empowers. These pragmatic functions are embedded in both the structure and performance of music and are crucial to understanding its impact on listeners. Music, like language, can be regarded as a universal medium of emotional and cognitive communication. Listeners across cultural boundaries can often intuitively detect emotional states in music through prosodic features such as pitch, tempo, and rhythm that mimic the emotional intonation of speech.

This deep connection between music and language is also supported by neurological research, which reveals that similar brain regions

are activated when processing both musical and linguistic stimuli. Such findings suggest a shared cognitive infrastructure for these two domains, further validating the view of music as a communicative system with structural and functional similarities to language. However, it is important to recognize that music, despite its expressive and affective power, does not operate as a language in the strictest linguistic sense. Unlike natural languages, music lacks the syntactic and semantic capacity to convey any arbitrary proposition to any listener. Nevertheless, the overlap between music and language especially in terms of structure, intention, and interpretation is significant enough to warrant more interdisciplinary research, particularly from a pragma-linguistic perspective.

It is within this theoretical and analytical framework that the current study is situated. By examining selected Yoruba musical texts, this research aims to investigate how music serves as a vehicle for addressing social and psychological well-being among individuals in Southwest Nigeria. The study pays close attention to how pragmatic acts such as consoling, advising, and encouraging are embedded in the lyrics and contextualized within cultural and social realities. Through this, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of music not just as a stylistic or artistic product, but as a potent communicative tool deeply rooted in human interaction and social experience.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to pragmatically analyse selected Yoruba songs in order to examine how they contribute to the overall psychological well-being of individuals. Specifically, it seeks to show how music by Beautiful Nubia, Ebenezer Obey, and King Sunny Adé functions as a communicative and therapeutic tool that consoles, advises, motivates, and regulates social behavior. By applying Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory, the study will demonstrate how the pragmatic features of these songs such as metaphor, presupposition, reference, and speech acts support emotional balance, resilience, stress reduction, cultural identity reinforcement, and social harmony.

Method

Based on purposive selection, data were selected from two (2) Beautiful Nubia (*Seven Lives* - 1997; *Kurunmi*- 2017), Ebenezer Obey (*Aimasiko* – 1987; *The Horse, The Man And His Son* – 2006) and Sunny Ade's (*The Good Shepherd* – 1989 and *Authority* – 1990) musical albums. The choice of selection is based on the view these Yoruba songs are embedded with linguistic content that capture contemporary social issues dominant within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Additionally, this study observes that the selected songs are evergreen musical renditions embedded with issues relevant within this modern period.

Segun Akinlolu whose stage name is Beautiful Nubia is a musician, a poet and university graduate. He is a cultural philosopher who uses music as a powerful tool for social discourse, moral reflection, and emotional connection. His rich narrative style, roots-driven melodies, and commitment to cultural authenticity make him a unique and transformative force in African music. Ebenezer Obey's life and career are a testament to innovation, tradition, and spiritual depth. From pioneering a new juju sound enriched with modern instrumentation to seamlessly integrating meaningful, philosophical, and spiritual messages into his music; he remains a defining figure in Africa's musical history. Sunny Ade is one of Nigeria's most celebrated musicians, globally recognized as the "King of Juju Music." His career spans over five decades, modernizing traditional Yoruba music by blending it with Western instruments like the pedal steel guitar and synthesizers. His lyrics are deeply rooted in Yoruba philosophy, proverbs, prayers, and moral lessons, which uplift listeners and serve as a source of psychological wellbeing. His music often emphasizes patience, destiny, hope, gratitude, communal values, and resilience. Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory served as the framework. The theory is context-based, making it suitable for this study. Hence, a descriptive design was adopted while the data were subjected to pragmatic analysis.

Result and Discussion

Findings show that the selected songs of

Beautiful Nubia, Ebenezer Obey and Sunny Ade, from a pragmatic perspective, demonstrate the relationship between music and psychological wellbeing. The findings reveal that excerpts from the musical albums operate as a psycho-therapeutic discourses that console, encourage, motivate, and instruct. Through pragmatic devices such as metaphors, speech acts, presuppositions, and implicatures, the lyrics provide emotional healing and moral guidance. The analysis further shows that Yoruba music, both traditional and contemporary, plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health by reducing stress, strengthening resilience, and reinforcing cultural identity. By drawing from Yoruba indigenous psychology and global theories of wellbeing, the selected Yoruba musical renditions demonstrate the enduring power of music as a tool for emotional balance and social harmony. A further discussion is examined below:

Music as a pragmatic stress reliever

Music, as it relates to different individuals, contributes to suppressing of socially induced stressors by regulating emotions, providing meaning, reinforcing identity, and creating communal support networks. This is evident in Beautiful Nubia's *Owuro Lojo eni ma rire o, eni ma rire o, ka se ba owuro o...* (Morning is a time when one can be blessed, hence, one should pay due homage to morning time). Here, 'morning' presupposes the passing of night (dark hour) which is not potent enough to bring blessing unlike the 'new dawn' – morning. This is a metaphorical (pragmatic MPH) expression which raises human hope of a better tomorrow thereby, mitigating human psychological stress of what 'tomorrow' would bring. Therefore, Beautiful Nubia pragmatically calls the attention of his listeners (the Youths as they symbolize morning) to judiciously make use of their youthful age which is the time that helps save the old from psychological stress.

Music as a pragma-prosodic cue of hope

While the story of Kurunmi carries tragedy, Beautiful Nubia uses it as a hopeful reminder that communities can learn, grow, and thrive beyond past failures. Through pragmatic reference (REF), Beautiful Nubia preaches the

theme of hope – a better Nigeria (to his listeners) in a framed term of philosophical acceptance, cultural resilience, and the assurance that life's struggles are temporary. Explicitly, the song goes thus:

*Here comes the fire-spitting guy!
Aare Kurunmi is on the way with his sword of
justice
Warn all the liars and pretenders
The day of reckoning is here, beware!
Okunrin ogun ni Kurunmi...
The Land will not remain the same.*

Nubia highlights the ephemerality of power, suffering, and material conditions; the reminder that brings psychological comfort: today's hardship will not last forever. This is a subtle but strong form of hope and reassurance. By calling listeners back to their roots, Nubia gives them hope that collective wisdom and solidarity can heal present challenges (social, political, or economic). By invoking Kurunmi, Nubia reminds listeners that no matter how powerful or tragic a leader's life was, the community survived and continued. This implies that societies can overcome struggles and move forward — a hopeful outlook for present and future Yoruba people. In essence, it could be said that the song is part of Nubia's broader project of using music as a tool for collective psychological healing and cultural reawakening.

Music as a metaphoric vehicle of patience

Patience is one of the emotional human attributes that counters anxiety (a psychological issue). Hence, Ebenezer Obey, in his song '*Aimasiko lo'damu eda o, oro mi lowo Oluwa lowa*' (which translates to 'uncertainty of time' or 'the unpredictability of life') emphasises the importance of patience to human psychological well-being. The song stresses patience (sùúrù), faith, and perseverance, because nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. It reminds listeners that destiny unfolds gradually, and one should not despair or be anxious about present struggles. No doubt, life's uncertainties can cause worry, depression, and hopelessness but then, Obey's message that "all things will happen at the right time" helps people calm their minds, reduce fear of the unknown, and accept life's rhythm. The song assures that today's suffering is temporary and that tomorrow may bring joy, wealth, or healing. This instills hope, which psychologists identify as a key factor in resilience and positive mental health. By urging listeners to wait patiently, Obey is teaching emotional self-control, which prevents impulsive decisions driven by frustration. Patience is a coping strategy that protects against psychological breakdowns during hardship. Thus, the song enhances psychological wellbeing by blending philosophy, spirituality, and music into a powerful message of hope, patience, and peace of mind.

Music as a pragmatic tool for social regulation

In this context, *social regulation* refers to how music functions as a tool to guide, correct, or influence people's behavior within society. In Yoruba culture, songs are often used not only for entertainment but also for moral instruction, conflict management, and reinforcement of communal norms. While Yoruba culture values community, Obey reminds listeners that self-worth must not be surrendered to collective pressure. This regulates the tension between individual freedom and communal expectations. This view is corroborated in Obey's song which goes thus:

<i>Ko sogbon to le da,</i>	(there is nothing you can do,)
<i>Ko siwa to lewu to le fi taye lorun o...</i>	(there is no action you know how to perform that can please human beings...)
<i>Ile aye fun igba die ni o,</i>	(this life is just going to be for a while.)
<i>Omo araye, e sere re o...</i>	(human beings, endeavor to do the right thing.)

From this excerpt, resilience is emphasized by reinforcing the idea that one must focus on living well rather than chasing approval. Thus, becomes psychologically therapeutic for an individual who feels intimidated by social pressure. In essence, Obey's song has served as a social regulating tool which cannot be undermined

within the Nigerian socio context. Thus, Obey eventually corroborates this view when he (musically) gives the narration of “*The Man, the Horse and the Son*”; thus, performing a social regulatory function. He uses music to caution listeners against over-dependence on public validation, to promote authenticity, and to help balance societal norms with personal conviction. In doing so, the song contributes both to cultural order and to the psychological well-being of individuals navigating social pressure.

Music as a spiritual therapeutic enhancement

In Sunny Ade’s *The Good Shepherd*, he draws on the biblical metaphor of Jesus as the shepherd who protects, guides, and provides for his flock. The song is both devotional and philosophical, serving not just as entertainment but also as moral, spiritual, and psychological reinforcement. The song reassures listeners of safety and guidance under God’s care, reducing fear and uncertainty. It encourages trust, obedience, and humility; virtues associated with being a “sheep” under divine guidance. ‘The shepherd’ is a metaphoric imagery which provides comfort for people dealing with life’s struggles. Just as sheep are cared for, listeners are reminded that they are not abandoned. By extension, for Yoruba Christians especially, the song instills confidence that challenges will pass because of divine provision and guidance. The song promotes the belief that righteous living under divine guidance brings peace. This reduces moral anxiety and guilt. In essence, Sunny Ade reassures listeners, strengthens their faith, and encourage moral reliance on God’s care. Through pragmatic acts of storytelling, metaphor, and music, the song directly contributes to the psychological well-being of people.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Yoruba music transcends mere artistic performance; it is a profound communicative and therapeutic medium that significantly contributes to the psychological well-being of individuals and the collective harmony of society. By applying Jacob Mey’s (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, the research revealed that Yoruba musicians such as Beautiful Nubia, Ebenezer Obey, and King Sunny Adé perform vital pragmatic acts: consoling, advising,

motivating, cautioning, and spiritually uplifting their listeners, through the intentional use of language, metaphor, and cultural symbolism in music. The analysis established that Yoruba songs serve as psycho-social instruments that help individuals manage stress, overcome anxiety, strengthen patience and resilience, and find meaning in challenging life circumstances. The lyrics analyzed demonstrate that music functions as both a mirror and a balm for human experience, reflecting communal struggles while offering comfort, guidance, and hope. Thus, the therapeutic power of music lies not only in its melody or rhythm but also in its linguistic and cultural pragmatics, which engage the listener’s emotions, beliefs, and identity within a shared socio-cultural context.

Furthermore, the study highlights that Yoruba music continues to play an indispensable role in social regulation, moral education, and the preservation of indigenous psychological frameworks. Through its rich communicative and symbolic resources, it bridges the gap between tradition and modernity, addressing both personal and collective well-being. In essence, Yoruba music remains an invaluable cultural resource for fostering mental health, emotional balance, and social cohesion. Its pragmatic potency underscores the importance of integrating indigenous musical expressions into contemporary approaches to psychological and community wellness. Future studies may build on these findings by exploring how the therapeutic and communicative functions of indigenous music can be incorporated into formal mental health interventions, education, and intercultural dialogue, thereby sustaining the relevance of Yoruba music in promoting holistic well-being across generations.

References

- Aluede, C. O., Ogisi, A. A., & Okakah, F. I. (2023) An Assessment of Indigenous Knowledge of Music Therapy in Nigeria. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v23i1.3073>
- Balogun, S.K., Monteiro, N.M. & Teseltso, T. (2013) Effects of Music genre and Music language on Task performance among University of Botswana Students. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1(3):38-43.
- Balogun, S.K., Oyinlola, A. O., Aluko, E. T & Ikobi, N. (2023) Effects of Gender, Music Genre and Volume of Music on Hand-Eye Coordination Task Among A Private University Students in Nigeria: A Follow-Up Study. *Covenant International Journal of Psychology*, 8(1)
- Balogun, S.K., Oyinlola, A. O., Aluko, E. T & Ikobi, N. (2022) Effects of Gender and Music Genre on Hand-Eye Coordination Task Among a Private University Students in Nigeria. *Current Research in Psychology and Behavioural Sciences*, 3(5):1-6
- Brown, S. & Jordania, J. (2013) Universals in the World's Musics. *Psychology Music*, 41:229-248. Cambridge Dictionary (2025), <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/helping>.
- Cheng J, Jiao C, Luo Y, & Cui F (2017) Music Induced Happy Mood Suppresses the Neural Responses to Other's Pain: Evidences from an ERP Study. *Scientific Reports*, 7:13-54. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-13386-0>
- Dhanabhakym, M., & Sarath, M. (2023). Psychological Wellbeing: A Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology*, 603–607. <https://doi.org/10.48175/ijarsct-8345>
- Ferraro, K. (2021) 7 Ways Music Can Help Reduce Stress and Anxiety. ASCAP Wellness Program. Accessed on 19 August, 2025. <https://www.ascap.com/help/wellness/7-ways-music-reduces-stress-anxiety#:~:text=Interestingly%2C%20music%20can%20help%20mitigate,by%20influencing%20your%20biological%20processes>.
- Fu H, Tu J (2023) Exploring the Influence of National Music Lessons on Subjective Well-being, Self-esteem, and National Identity among University Students: A Case Study from China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14:11-51. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1151007>
- Hendrix, J (2020) Music: A Love Language. Accessed on 21/8/2025. <https://medium.com/@introvertedblkwoman/music-a-love-language-8205f6ad3f22>
- John, S (2023) Is Music the Real Love Language? Accessed on 21/8/2025. <https://www.musicpandit.com/blog/is-music-the-real-love-language/#:~:text=It%20is%20by%20enabling%20the,the%20real%20language%20of%20love>.
- Karin, A. (2025) Music and Love: A Powerful Connection. Accessed on 21/8/2025. <https://lovemultiverse.com/music-and-love-a-powerful-connection/>
- Koelsch, S. (2014) Brain correlates of music-evoked emotions. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 15(3):170–180. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3666>
- Levine Music. (2023) How Music Affects Memory and Concentration. Accessed on 19 August, 2025. <https://www.levinemusic.org/about/news/how-music-affects-memory-and-concentration/#:~:text=Music%20and%20Concentration&text=Music%20with%20a%20slow%20tempo,even%20make%20tasks%20more%20enjoyable>.
- Leung, M. C., & Cheung, R. Y. M. (2018). Music Engagement and Well-being in Chinese Adolescents: Emotional Awareness, Positive Emotions, and Negative Emotions as Mediating Processes. *Psychology of Music*, 48(1):105- 119
- Mey, J. (2001). *Pragmatics: An introduction*. US: Blackwell.
- Mosobalaje, A. (2018) Textual Migration in Ebenezer Obey's Juju Music. *Journal of African Studies*, 77:14-21
- Oikelome, A.O. (2012) *Naija Hip Hop: An analysis of the music of 2Face Idibia*. Lagos Notes and Lagos State University Records.18:2.

- Perkins R, Mason-Bertrand A, Fancourt D, Baxter L, & Williamon A. (2020) *How Participatory Music Engagement Supports Mental Well-being: A Meta-Ethnography*. *Qualitative Health Research*, 30(12):1924-1940.
- Saint Diamonds. (2024) *15 Songs to Reflect on and Honor the Memories of a Loved One Who Has Passed*. Accessed on 19/8/2025 on <https://saintdiamonds.com/blog/15-songs-to-reflect-on-and-honor-the-memories-of-a-loved-one-who-has-passed/#:~:text=How%20Music%20Aids%20in%20the,the%20strength%20to%20carry%20on.>
- Quilon, A. (2024) *Role of Eco-spirituality in Psychological Well-Being of Selected Working Women*. *Bendani Research Journal*, 9(1):196-220
- Smithsonian Music. (2025) *Love and Music*. Accessed on 21/8/2025. <https://music.si.edu/feature/love-and-music/#:~:text=Music%20and%20love%20are%20natural,connected%20with%20love%20through%20music.>
- Vuust P, Heggli OA, Friston KJ, & Kringelbach ML (2022) *Music in the brain*. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 23(5):287–305.
- Terry, P. C., Karageorghis, C. I., Curran, M. L., Martin, O. V., & Parsons-Smith, R. L. (2020). *Effects of Music in Exercise and Sport: A meta-analytic review*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(2):91–117. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000216>
- True Life Planners. (2025) *Songs about Achieving Goals: 20 Motivational Songs to Empower Your Success*. Accessed on 21/8/2025. <https://lifetreeplanner.com/songs-about-achieving-goals/#:~:text=Songs%20can%20be%20powerful%20life,stand%20tall%20and%20keep%20going.>
- Tu, J., & Fu, H. (2024) *The Path to Happiness for Music Students: Music Empathy and Music Engagement as Potential Sources of Subjective Well-being*. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11:10-37. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03533-0>
- Wani, H. R., & Ahmed, A. (2024) *A Study Exploring the Impact of Unemployment on the Psychological Well-being of Youth*. *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aswp.12316>
- World Health Organization (1948). *Summary Reports on Proceedings Minutes and Final Acts of the International Health Conference held in New York from 19 June to 22 July 1946*. World Health Organization. Retrieved from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/85573>