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Teachers' Perceptions on Music Education in Swaziland Primary Schools

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Abstract:

This study sought to establish teachers' perceptions of music education in Swaziland primary schools. The study was located in the interpretivist research paradigm and followed a qualitative research approach which applied a case study design. Individual interviews and focus group discussions with a purposive sample of 58 practising teachers were used to collect data. Data were analysed for content and conclusions were drawn. The findings of the study reveal that there are benefits to music education. The study found that music was not regarded as a subject in the Swaziland curriculum, but an extra-curricular activity in some schools. The study revealed that schools do not have the appropriate resources needed to teach music. The main conclusions of the study were that music was not given the respect it deserved in the Swaziland curriculum. It was also concluded that teachers needed to be trained to teach music. The main recommendations are that teachers should be appropriately trained in music education so that they are able to teach music as a subject in schools. The study also recommends that schools should provide the appropriate teaching and learning resources to support teachers and learners in music education. It is a recommendation in this study that primary school music education programmes be formulated. Timetabling should ensure that music education is given enough hours per week and that the hours allocated to music education be used for music and not for other subjects. It is also recommended that music education becomes an examinable subject at grade seven.

Keywords: *Practical subjects, technical education, music education, primary school, practical arts*

1. Introduction

Music is one subject that contributes to the young children's intellectual, cultural, emotional and spiritual development and should not be separated from the rest of the curriculum. Including music across the curriculum will afford learners with capabilities that will widen their thinking and facilitate a deeper understanding of the world in which they live. It is ideal to involve all learners in music in the classroom through pleasurable activities because music is enjoyable and beautiful (Roese, 2003). Music education in primary schools is one of the most interesting subjects that every child should be given an opportunity to learn. Music education contributes greatly to the development of culture in any society, thus, children learn the norms and values of different communities through music education. The value of music in learners' education in schools makes it a valuable subject in the school curriculum and therefore the subject deserves an equal position with the other subjects (Zindi, 2015).

1.1. Background to the Study

Children who are actively involved in music education in primary schools are prepared for a better standard of living because they develop a strong foundational knowledge of their abilities and a greater self-esteem. It is vital for primary schools to provide learners with music education because of the valuable role the subject has in the school curriculum (Lamont, 2005).

Music education is meant to contribute to the musical development of learners and positively influence the success of learners in the schools. Music education in learners, activates varied emotional processes that influence and intensify their involvement in all subjects. Music relaxes learners and removes stressful situations. Music education can also be a means of integrating learners with special needs into the activities done in schools (Slosar, 1998). Using music in the classroom in teaching and learning creates a positive classroom environment.

1.1.1. Benefits of Learning Music in Primary School

Primary school children generally have a short attention span and music can help to hold young children's interest. Music also helps teachers to keep lessons interesting as they mingle serious business with movement (Day2dayparenting, 2013). Lucas (2017:2) states that "Students of all ages—that includes adults— generally find that music helps them focus more clearly on the task at hand and puts them in a better mood for learning," Similarly, Schellenberg (2006) reveals that music education assists learners to concentrate and focus on any task they are specified with. In music education learners are involved in focused attention for long periods of time, decoding complex patterns of visual music symbols, reading music. This practice is often done daily, thus, learners learn to concentrate and focus on any assignment they are given.

Music education helps strengthen the learners' memory skills and promotes encoding, storage and retrieval skills (Lucas, 2017). Schellenberg (2006) reveals that in music learners are expected to memorize extended passages and entire pieces of assigned music, learn about rules of pattern formation that define Western musical structures including intervals, scales, chords, and chord progressions. Music practice gives learners the experience to memorize information and retrieve it whenever it is needed. Through music education, teachers in schools are able to help learners retain information taught (Lucas, 2017).

Children in primary schools are at a stage where they are learning the basics of all their primary school subjects. Cultivating children's music talents stimulates the development of skills in significant academic areas such as language, mathematics and science (Zindi, 2015). Similarly, Bright Horizons (2017) points out that music provides children with the pleasure of listening to soothing sounds and rhythmic harmonies, to gaining new language and social skills.

Music has been found to stimulate parts of the brain (Lucas, 2017). A 2016 study at the University of Southern California's Brain and Creativity Institute found that musical experiences in childhood can actually accelerate brain development, particularly in the areas of language acquisition and reading skills. According to the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation (NAMM Foundation), learning to play an instrument can improve mathematical learning (Bright Horizons, 2017).

Brown (2017) reveals that learning music facilitates learning other subjects and enhances skills that children inevitably use in other areas. Music relates to other subjects in the curriculum and it can be used as a tool to learn those subjects. Garcia (2013) points out that music is a powerful tool to teach diversity, acceptance, history, and most importantly, historical context. For instance, there are numerous songs used to teach events that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Music education involves more than the voice or fingers playing an instrument, a child learning music has to tap into multiple skill sets, often simultaneously. For instance in music education, people use their ears and eyes, as well as large and small muscles. Music education supports all learning, and it's a very integrating, stimulating pastime or activity (Brown, 2017).

A study carried by Schellenberg (2006) in Toronto amongst 6- to 11-year-olds on long-term positive associations between music lessons and IQ, revealed that formal exposure to music in childhood is associated positively with IQ and with academic performance and that such associations are small but general and long-lasting. Music's association with IQ and academic performance makes music a worthy subject to be included in the school curriculum. It is, therefore, vital for children to be exposed to music at primary school.

The study by Roese (2003) reveals that in Wales in the 19th-century music played a vital role in primary schools, but, it did not have a subject status in the school curriculum. In 1985 every school in Wales was instructed to have a curriculum in music as in all other subjects and a framework was set out within which each school might develop a music programme appropriate to its own pupils. Music was designated a foundation subject in the National Curriculum in 1988. Two years later, the comments and suggestions of experts and practitioners led to a significant influence on the debates over the introduction of Music as a National Curriculum subject. The National Curriculum for Music finally became statutory in 1992. This has seen the subject music as a compulsory subject for children between the ages of five and fourteen in Wales.

Gazemba and Wanyama (2014) reveal that in Kenya the music education curriculum was affected in 1984. The music curriculum in Kenya took an 8:4:4 system, meaning, 8 years in primary, 4 years in secondary and 4 years in university. The music curriculum in Kenya was made compulsory and examinable at the primary school level and an elective but examinable subject at the secondary and university levels. This move motivated gifted learners and teachers into music making and performance and gave them an opportunity to earn a living from their respective disciplines in music.

Samkange (2016) reveals that the Zimbabwe school curriculum at both primary and secondary school levels has provisions for at least two practical subjects that schools have to teach. Music is one of the practical subjects that are expected to be taught at both primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. On the 4th of September 2012, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, speaking at the Research Intellectual Expo at the University of Zimbabwe expressed concern that practical subjects such as music were not receiving fair attention like other curriculum subjects. In some cases, some schools were not even offering music as a curriculum subject.

A move was made in 2012 to ensure that music as a subject was given the status it deserves in Zimbabwe. There were a number of Teacher Education Colleges that offered Music as one of the major subjects that trainee teachers can specialize in. The United College of Education in Bulawayo houses and supports Kwanengoma College of Music. The College of Music in Harare was also instituted for the same purpose. At the university level, some now have Faculties or Departments of Music. Universities that offer music as a degree programme include Midlands State University and Great Zimbabwe, among others. This, therefore, demonstrates a commitment on the part of tertiary institutions. These institutions have been producing Music teachers for some years now (Samkange, 2016).

1.1.2. The Current Swaziland Primary School Curriculum

In Swaziland music is not listed as one of the core subjects (Macmillan Education Swaziland, 2017). Stacy (2016) reveals that music education had not been a high priority for a country with a persistent lack of educational resources. With no music taught within the current national school curriculum, musical skills are transmitted in alternative ways outside the school. An important space for musical learning in Swaziland is the *Incwala* and *Umhlanga* mass participatory cultural events held every year. These events involve a large body of polyphonic vocal music and accompanying dances which young girls and boys learn through participation.

In Swaziland music is also done in ensembles such as choirs or dance troupes which schools have after-class and the level of musical proficiency in these ensembles is high. There are also examples of passionate practitioners in different regions in Swaziland who organise local children into creative ensembles outside of school contexts. The Swazi *sibhaca* dance and gumboot dance are popular forms of group music-making (Stacy, 2016).

Swaziland teacher training institutes offer music as a professional study to primary school teachers. Ndawi (1997) points out that teacher training colleges have a trend of developing students' depth of content in one or two subjects. The qualifications needed for a teacher to teach at a primary school are a three-year diploma from a teachers' college and a four-year degree from the University of Swaziland. Both training institutes offer music as a professional study course to the teachers and not a specialization. The National Curriculum Centre is charged with the responsibility of designing and developing materials for primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2011).

The Swaziland Ministry of Education and Training (2017) points out that primary education is a seven-year programme that finishes with an end of Primary school Examination (SPC) in grade 7 which is a locally based assessment administered by the Examinations Council through schools. The core subjects offered at **primary school (Grades 1–7) are** English language, SiSwati, Mathematics, Science, Religious education, Social studies, Physical education and Practical Arts. The core subjects in the Swaziland curriculum are given up to 6 hours per week in the timetable. Practical Arts was introduced into the primary school curriculum in 1981 and the Swaziland education system is still using what was instituted then. Practical Arts is actually comprised of six different subjects namely: Agriculture, Arts and Crafts, Business, Consumer science or Home Economics, and Music. These subjects share a single slot in the primary school timetable which is 2 hours per week (Porter, 1984).

There are electives offered at this level and these are French, Afrikaans, Consumer Sciences, Agriculture and Home Economics (Macmillan Education Swaziland, 2017). Despite the professional study music course offered to teachers during their teacher training, music is not offered as a subject in the primary school curriculum, but a strand in practical arts. This study sought to establish teachers' perceptions of music education in Swaziland primary schools.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Piaget (1894–1898) believes that the development of a child takes place through a continuous transformation of thought processes (Miendlarzewska & Trost, 2014). Ojose (2008) reveals that Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that child development progresses through stages that are characterised by unique ways of understanding the world. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development has four primary stages of development namely, sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational (Cherry, 2017). In all the stages, music plays an important role in child development.

Language acquisition in a child starts from the sensory stage of cognitive development (Wood, Smith, Grossniklaus, 2001). Lucas (2017) reveals that music has been found to stimulate parts of the brain particularly in the areas of language acquisition and reading skills in humans. In the preoperational stage, children come to understand object permanence though they are still developing the concept of conservation. Music education is vital at this stage since it helps children to strengthen memory skills (Brown, (2017).

The concrete stage of child development is when concepts attached to concrete situations, time, space, and quantity are understood and can be applied. While the formal operational stage is when a child can apply concepts taught to another context. Thus, nurturing music talents in children stimulate the development of skills in major academic areas like language, mathematics and science (Zindi, 2015).

The child's academic achievement is not the only benefit of music education and exposure. Music ignites all areas of child development and skills for school readiness, intellectual, social and emotional, motor, language, and overall literacy. Music education helps the body and the mind to work together (Bright Horizons, 2017). Dancing to music helps children build motor skills while allowing them to practice self-expression. In addition to the developmental benefits, music provides learners with joy (The Genesis Centre, 2015). Miendlarzewska and Trost (2014) reveal that music education provokes near and far transfer effects, preparing a foundation for a range of skills, and thus fostering cognitive development.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Teacher education institutions are offering music as a professional course to primary school teachers but music is not timetabled as a subject in Swaziland primary schools (Macmillan Education Swaziland, 2017). This has deprived learners of a valuable subject in schools. Stacy (2016) reveals that young people in Swaziland often opt to do their musical studies in South Africa. This study will establish the views of teachers on music education in Swaziland primary schools.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish how teachers view music education in Swaziland primary schools. This study set out to examine and provide information on the benefits of music education to a primary school learner. The other purpose of this study was also to propose what could be done in preparation for the introduction of music as a subject.

1.5. Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do teachers perceive music education in Swaziland primary schools?
- What benefits does music education have to primary school children?
- How much knowledge do teachers have in music education?
- What could be done in preparation for the introduction of music as a subject?

1.6. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Establish teachers' perceptions of music education in Swaziland primary schools.
- Describe the benefits of music education to primary school children.
- Establish how much knowledge teachers have in music education.
- Suggest what could be done in preparation for the introduction of music as a subject

1.7. Research Methodology

The research paradigm and methodology used in this study were guided by the research objectives and questions which were set to establish teachers' perceptions of music education in Swaziland primary schools. The research process, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures are highlighted.

1.8.1. Research Paradigm

The study was located in the interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivists' researchers use professional judgments and perspectives in the interpretation of data (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) state that the interpretive perspective epistemologically believes that social meaning is created during interactions, implying that different social actors may, in fact, understand social reality differently, producing different meanings and analyses. The researcher in this study interacted with the teachers to attain information on music education in Swaziland primary schools.

1.8.2. Research Approach

The study was conducted within the qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a set of interpretive materials that make the world visible. Merriam (2009:14) states that in qualitative research "*the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning*". This approach was relevant to the study in that through the qualitative approach an understanding of music education in Swaziland primary schools was going to be revealed.

1.8.3. Research Design

This study adopted a case study design. Litchman (2013) states that a case study is often recognised as one vital approach to qualitative research. The entity used could be as small as one individual or as large as an entire school or community. Rule and John (2011:3) concur with this view by saying "A case might be a person, a classroom, a programme, a process, a series of developments, an institution or even a country." What makes it to be said a case is a singular and distinct nature that warrants it to be studied. In this study, the researcher chose to engage teachers to attain information on music teaching and learning in Swaziland.

1.8.4. Population

A population in a research context is any target group of individuals that have common characteristics that have information relevant to the researcher concerning the study in question. Landreneau (2012:1) views a population in a research context "*... as any target group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common that is of interest to the researcher for purposes of drawing conclusions.*" In this study, teachers were chosen as they are the music curriculum implementers.

1.9. Data Collection Instruments

Qualitative research methods can be identified by the type of research instruments and data gathering procedures that generate words rather than numbers (Patton & Cochran, 2002). In this study on teachers' perceptions of music education in Swaziland primary schools, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were the data gathering methods employed (Porter, 2007). The questions that were asked in face-to-face interviews were also asked in focus group discussions so as to triangulate data obtained from both instruments. Patton (1999) reveals that triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. In this study, the

researcher used method triangulation. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions enabled the researcher to capture narrative views from participants, of which verbatim quotation were made to reveal the teachers' perceptions.

1.9.1. Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample is a group of cases or individuals selected from all the possible respondents in a population in which the study is being conducted. Sampling is the selection of research participants from an entire population and involves decisions about which people, settings, events and behaviours. The main concern in sampling is representativeness (Gomm, Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2009). In this study, I purposely selected 58 practising teachers coming from all the four provinces of the country and from both rural and urban schools. The participants chosen were representative of the population that I aimed at drawing conclusions from.

1.9.2. Data Analysis

The analysis involves working with data, organising them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others. Boeije (2010:76) concurs with this view by pointing out that:

Qualitative analysis is the segmenting of data into relevant categories and the naming of these categories with codes while simultaneously generating the categories from the data. In the reassembling phase, the categories are related to one another to generate a theoretical understanding of the social phenomenon under study in terms of the research questions.

Data analysis is the process used to answer research questions. These answers are also called categories or themes or findings (Merriam, 2009). In this study, tape recordings from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed into text, summarised and grouped according to the identified themes before making descriptions. Descriptions allowed the researcher to organise, describe and summarise observations.

1.10. Findings of the Study and Discussion

The findings of the study were presented following the themes that emerged from the study. The themes that emerged from the study were namely; the status of music education in Swaziland primary schools, views on introducing music as a subject in primary schools, resources available and teachers' knowledge in music.

1.10.1. The Status of Music Education in Swaziland Primary Schools

Teachers' views on music education in Swaziland primary schools were sought. All teacher from both focus group discussions and individual interviews revealed that music was not a subject in the primary school curriculum. One teacher responded by stating that, "Music is not a subject in the curriculum." Similarly, another teacher indicated that "Music is not taught as a subject in schools." The responses from the teachers indicate that music in Swaziland primary schools is not regarded as a subject in the primary school curriculum.

In the same token, one teacher indicated that "Music is not a subject but it is treated as an extracurricular activity." Likewise, one teacher indicated that "Music is not a subject in the primary school curriculum, but it is part of a subject called practical arts." Another teacher revealed that "We only teach it as part of practical arts in lower grades," Teachers indicated that music in Swaziland primary schools is a component of practical arts. However, one teacher pointed out that, "There are no practical arts at our school and we don't teach music at all." As I probed further, teachers indicated that music in practical arts is a strand taught in that particular subject. The responses also pointed to the fact that in primary school practical arts where music is a component is only taught to lower grades in some schools and never taught at all in some schools.

On another dimension, the interviewed teachers indicated that "Music is not taught as a subject in schools, but it is an extra-curricular activity." Similarly, one teacher indicated that "Music is not a subject in the curriculum in my school. It is part of our extra-curricular activities. Music is actually taught only to those interested in music." The responses from the teachers indicate that music in some schools is not taught even as a part of practical arts, but it is regarded as an extra-curricular activity where only those interested in teaching and learning music activities get involved.

Again teachers indicated that "Music is part of the practical arts subject taught in the primary school, but does not appear on the timetable as a lesson because it is not examinable." Similarly, another teacher indicated that "Music is not one of the subjects in the curriculum, but part of the subject practical arts, even in practical arts we hardly teach it because it is not examinable." Another teacher stated that "In our school, we don't teach it at all because it is not examinable." Teachers revealed that apart from music appearing as a component of practical arts, the subject is not taught at all in Swaziland primary schools because it is not an examinable subject. Teachers preferred to teach examinable subjects in upper grades even during the practical arts (music) time on the timetable. One interviewed teacher indicated that in their school the subject practical arts (music) appears last on the timetable of the day and that time is used for either sports or cleaning the school.

1.10.2. Views on Introducing Music as a Subject in Primary Schools

Teachers were asked about how they perceive the introduction of music as a subject in Swaziland primary schools. One teacher indicated that "*If music had to be introduced as a subject, I think it will be an overload to the teachers and the*

learners because right now in my school we are doing 10 subjects. I think there won't be time for the subject at all." This teacher's response reveals that there are some teachers who view the introduction of music as a subject a burden as it will increase their workload, hence they are not prepared to teach the subject.

Contrary to the view on not introducing music in primary schools, one teacher pointed out that, "I am for the idea that music should be taught in schools as a subject in Swaziland schools." On the same note, one teacher indicated that "Music is worthy to be taught as a subject in schools as it empowers the pupils with a career." One teacher pointed out that, "If music was to be introduced, it would benefit some of the learners after finishing school because they can earn a living through music." One teacher also had the view that, "If music has to be introduced as a subject, it would help to arouse the interest of pupils who are musically gifted." Similarly, one other teacher indicated that "Music is worthy to be taught as a subject as it empowers the pupils with career development. They can become musicians." It was pointed out that "If music had to be introduced to as a subject I would support that. This is because it develops skills among students and can enable them to earn living." Some teachers viewed the introduction of music as a subject beneficiary to the gifted learners and also as good career development.

1.10.3. Resources Available

Teachers from those schools who indicated that they have practical arts as a subject in the primary school curriculum were asked on the available music resources. The study revealed that government schools in Swaziland did not have any music resources available. Those who taught music as an extra-curricular activity indicated that they have a pitch pipe. When they were asked on the acquisition of the instruments, one teacher indicated that "*It is not possible to buy music instruments due to the financial crisis in the schools because the support assistance from the government is limited and its use is stipulated to essential areas in the school.*" On the same note, one other teacher revealed that "*The financial muscle of the rural schools I teach in will not permit the school to purchase music equipment.*" Teachers' responses point to the fact that there are currently no music resources in Swaziland primary schools even though teachers are expected to teach it as a component of practical arts. The responses also point out to the fact that financial resources injected into the primary education system are limited to afford the schools to buy music resources.

1.10.4. Teachers' Knowledge of Music

It was in the interest of the study to establish how much knowledge teachers have in music education. One practising teacher indicated that "I am not trained to teach music." Another teacher revealed that "Teachers have to be capacitated on the teaching of music. As a teacher, I'm not in a position to teach music due to the type of training I received which did not have a music specialization." On the same note, one teacher indicated that "The challenges of introducing music as a subject is that teachers have limited skills to teach music." One respondent revealed that "Most music teachers in the country cannot teach music as a subject. I cannot teach music. I only did music but I cannot say I can teach it because it was not one of my specialisations." Lastly, one teacher indicated that "Teachers do not teach music lessons because they do not know music, instead of teaching the music teachers continue to the next topic." Teachers' responses reveal that teachers have a limited knowledge of music and are not confident to teach the subject at all. The responses also indicate that instead of teaching music teachers move on to teach other subjects.

2. Discussion of Findings

The results of the study revealed that music in Swaziland primary schools is not valued, hence, it is not regarded as a subject in the primary school curriculum, but a component of the subject practical arts. This is contrary to the views by Zindi (2015) who indicates that music has value in the learners' education and the subject deserves an equal position as other core subjects. The study revealed that school timetables are crafted in such a way that the subject practical arts (music) is placed as the last lesson of the day so that instead of doing the subject, learners either go for sports or cleaning the school. This view is also contrary to that of Lamont (2005) who is of the view that primary schools should be involved in music education because of the valuable role the subject has in the school curriculum.

The study revealed that teachers preferred to teach examinable subjects even during the practical arts time on the timetable and in upper grades. In some schools, practical arts (music) is not taught at all. This is contrary to the view by Roes (2003) who reveals that all learners should be involved in music in the classroom through pleasurable activities because music is enjoyable and beautiful. The results of the study reveal that some teachers viewed the introduction of music as a subject beneficiary to the gifted learners and also as good career development. This perception is in line with views from Gazemba and Wanyama (2014) who reveal that after the music curriculum was made compulsory and examinable at primary school level in Kenya, gifted learners and teachers into music making and performance had an opportunity to earn a living from their respective disciplines in music.

The teachers' views are that currently there are no music resources in Swaziland primary schools even though teachers are expected to teach it as a component of practical arts is in line with views from Stacy (2016) who reveals that Swaziland could not prioritise in sourcing resources for music as a subject in primary schools because the country is with a persistent lack of educational resources. The study revealed that teachers have limited knowledge of music and are not confident to teach the subject because they did not specialize in the subject during their teacher training, but did music as a

professional study. This is contrary to the view by Ndawi (1997) who points out that teacher institutes train in different subject specialisations including music, but this has not been the case with music in Swaziland teacher training institutes. Teachers learn music as a professional subject. The responses also indicate that instead of teaching music teachers teach other subjects that are examinable. This is contrary to the views from Samkange and Chimbadzwa (2016) who reveals that The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education of Zimbabwe instituted teacher training colleges and music departments in Zimbabwe in response to the need to have specialized personnel in music education.

3. Conclusions of the Study

The main conclusions of the study were that music was not given the respect it deserved in the Swaziland curriculum. It was also concluded that teachers needed to be trained to teach music.

4. Recommendations

The main recommendations are that teachers should be appropriately skilled in music education. The study also recommends that schools should provide the appropriate teaching and learning resources to support teachers and learners in music education. It is a recommendation in this study that primary school music programmes be formulated. Timetabling should ensure that music education is given enough hours per week. It is also recommended that music education becomes an examinable subject at grade seven.

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