

Challenges Contributing to Non-Teaching of Music in Primary Schools: A Case of Three Selected Schools in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study explores challenges that contribute to the non-teaching of music in three selected primary schools of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. The article specifically aims to establish why despite being a compulsory subject for primary schools music is not taught in the three selected schools, to possibly stimulate interest in the teaching and learning of music at primary school level and to motivate further research into the topic of non-teaching of music in primary schools. The study employed a phenomenological research design. The sample size comprised of seven teachers who were purposively sampled and interviewed. Observation and interview guides were administered to school leadership and teachers to collect data. Thick descriptions were used to analyse data in the final document compilation. Findings of the research indicated that, challenges that perpetrate the non-teaching of music are multiple and somehow common in the three schools under study. Curriculum related issues, the taking of music subject by non-specialized teachers, absence of music textbooks, lack of physical resources such as space for teaching of music, lack of support, teachers' overload with work, music as an unexamined subject, and lack of priority for music are some of the challenges contributing to the non-teaching of music in primary schools. Recommendations made are the employing of an educative programme for staff in counteraction to the lack of music knowledge, training of more teachers in the Visual and Performing Arts, availing of support and resources such as textbooks, music rooms and auditoriums for the teaching of music in schools.

Keywords: *Music non-teaching experiences, music specialists, curriculum, visual and performing arts, music education*

INTRODUCTION

Music is a vital aspect of life at every level of human existence, from infancy to maturity as an adult. It is so important because of its intrinsic value and benefits to other aspects of human competence (Peery, 1987). As observed by Okongo (2009), music plays an essential role in child development. Depriving children of music is somehow a deficiency of the necessary child development processes, therefore, child development experts and educators find meaning in children's music training.

The teaching and learning of music received special attention in many countries worldwide. Several nations made observable efforts to ensure that primary school children access high quality music education. Some European countries have prioritized the teaching of music in different ways, one of which is the adoption of a policy that gives special prominence to music. The formulation and implementation of music laws in these European countries was directed towards giving music a valid position in the curriculum. For example, in Austria and Belgium music laws were made to control and provide quality music education in music schools. In Austria, a country that is segmented into federal states, each state has its own music school law. These laws state that a large number of people, especially young children need to study at a music school. In Belgium, the French speaking part possesses a music school law maintaining that every person is allowed to learn music and children up to 12 do not pay for it (Erasmus Thematic Network for Music, 2007). In some countries like Estonia that do not have music laws, a union of music schools ensures quality music education. In the Zimbabwean scenario under focus in this research paper, it is important to find out how the country has considered music as a subject in the curriculum.

In African nations the teaching of music in schools has been an issue of major concern. As exemplified by Kenya, according to Wanyama,

...the 1984 education system paid much attention to music education in the 8 years of primary, 4 years secondary and 4 years university education.

The Kenyan education system endorsed a distinctive primary school curriculum that made music a compulsory and examinable subject. Although in the year 2000, this condition was reversed, commendable attention had been rendered to music education in the curriculum (2006: 1). South African schools consider music as a compulsory subject and children learn music from their pre-school year (5 to 6 year old) through to their grade 9, (Jansen van Vuuren, 2012). Music is taught in the form of drama, dance, music and visual art aspects which are always taught in integration and never in isolation. The Zimbabwean primary school set up under discussion in this paper endeavors to explain causes of the non-teaching of music which has been rather prioritized by such neighboring countries as South Africa. Prior to the discussion of results, it is of worth to briefly view the Zimbabwean school setting.

The Zimbabwean schooling years embrace a total of fifteen years, the first nine of which are primary school years. The first four years are for infancy education ranging from Early Childhood (two years prior to grade 1). The last five years (grades 3 to 7) constitute junior primary schooling. Music Education has always been part of the education curriculum in Zimbabwe after her independence in 1980 and with greater emphasis as from 2004. Primary school children in Zimbabwe take music as a compulsory subject as of 2004 (Zindi 2014). From 2004, there were further developments in the teaching of music in primary schools of Zimbabwe which might have led to the teaching and non-teaching of music. Some of these developments are illuminated in this paper.

In 2015 a new Curriculum that determines the teaching and learning of music in primary schools was set in place under the leadership of Dr. Lazarus Dokora, the then Minister of Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. In the new curriculum music is compulsory, presented as Visual and Performing arts and is supposed to be learnt through all the nine years of primary school. By the time this research was conducted, music was not yet examinable in the local exams and the grade 7 examinations. Music exists in both the curriculum and extra curricula aspects of Zimbabwean primary schools. Choral competitions, traditional dance competitions, ensemble competitions expose students to music activities. There are the SASSAF, CASSAF, DASSAF, PASSAF and NASSAF competitions for choral music and ensembles. The five abbreviated competitions are Schools' Annual Sport, Science and Arts Festivals, Cluster Annual Sport, Science and Arts Festivals, District Sport, Science and Arts Festivals, Provincial Sport, Science and Arts Festivals and National Sport, Science and Arts Festivals.

The Zimbabwean ministry of Education obligates music as a compulsory subject in primary schools. A lacuna however exists as to how music still remains a subject that is not or rarely taught in some primary schools of Masvingo province. It has become of interest to us (the two researchers) as to how teachers' experiences in primary schools drive them into non-teaching of music. Therefore, this study sought to explore the challenges contributing to the non-teaching of music in three selected primary schools in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a phenomenological research design. This design involves study of phenomena in natural settings and attempts to make sense of the meanings that people attach to the phenomena (Yilmaz, 2013; Lincoln, 2000). The design was found appropriate to illuminate the challenges attributed to non-teaching of music in three selected schools in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe.

The study was conducted in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe. Masvingo is a Zimbabwean province and its town lies along the Harare-Johannesburg route. Only three schools were chosen from this province in this study. One of the schools is rural and two are in the periphery of Masvingo urban.

The target population comprised of teachers drawn from primary schools in Masvingo Province. Three primary schools were selected for this study. Seven teachers including one school head were purposively selected, interviewed and audio recorded. Through snowballing, other teachers were identified and interviewed to express issues about music education in Zimbabwean primary schools.

With regards to data collection, observations were made from a 2017-2018 primary school teachers' workshop on music as Visual and Performing arts. Face to face interviews were also conducted, each stretching for 30-45 minutes and captured with a digital audio recorder for accuracy. The aim was to prompt the challenges that contributed to non-teaching of music in primary schools. This information was useful in supporting the data from an initial group discussion scenario where some teachers discussing non-teaching of music at their schools were also interviewed. In some two cases, telephone interviews were conducted with teachers who could not avail themselves in person.

The information recorded on digital recorders was analysed using thematic analysis to find out challenges that contributed to non-teaching of music in primary schools. Thick descriptions were used to transcribe the final document. As explained by Holloway (1997), thick descriptions were suitable as they give a detailed account of field experiences in which unambiguous the patterns of social interactions can be drawn before placing them in perspective.

Permission was sought to interview participants of this study who were the school heads and teachers. Moreover, informants were assured of confidentiality where they deemed it necessary. Participants also requested anonymity of both themselves and their schools. The information collected from interviews was reviewed by the interviewees to confirm correctness, and finally, permission to publish it was granted. Additionally, participants were informed of their unforced participation and freedom to withdraw from the research when they felt they could not continue. As recommended by Tuckman and Harper (2014), participation is voluntary, may be discontinued at any moment and without participant penalization.

RESULTS

Curriculum Connected Challenges

According to one teacher, (participant 2)

We are not clear with the term Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) and hence fail to interpret the requirements of music as part of VPA.

In connection with curriculum related challenges, participant 6 echoed,

The consideration of music as both a curriculum and extra-curriculum subject leads to non-teaching. It is repetitive to teach music in both aspects, it should be learnt in extra curricula activities only.

Challenges Emanating from Teaching of the Music Subject by Non-Specialized Teachers

The engagement of non-specialized teachers to impart musical knowledge and skills is also a factor contributing towards non-teaching of music. As stated by participant 5,

It has been rare to get teachers who are specialists in music especially the current area of Visual and Performing Arts. Most of the primary school teachers that have been trained are non-specialists in the Visual and performing Arts thereby dominating the primary schools. Currently, in the three schools under study, there is no music specialist, one of the schools resorted to hiring a music specialist from another school and he only taught music once in a week.

Absence of Music Textbooks

As referred to by participant 6,

Kushayikwa kwemabhuku emusic kunoita kuti tisaidzidzise. Hatina kana one bhuku remwana kana romudzidzisi tinodzisa sei?

Literally this statement means,

Absence of music textbooks makes us avoid teaching the subject. There is not even a single textbook for the teacher or for the student...

Lack of Physical Resources Such as Music Rooms and Space for Teaching Music

Participant 1, a teacher at one of the schools had this to say,

Kushaikwa kwenzvimbo inokodzera yakatambanuka iri kure nedzimwe kirasi youkudzidzira nokudzidzira injodzi huru

translated in English this implies,

Lack of suitable music rooms withdrawn from the rest of the classrooms as well as spacious venues for teaching and learning of music is a big disaster.

Lack of Support

We music teachers have no one to support us in this task, no support in professional terms and financial support boomed.

participant 7, who was the hired music specialist.

Teachers' Overload with Work

Teachers delivering music in primary schools are overloaded with work and in the execution of their tasks end up avoiding teaching music,

was declared by participant 3 in English.

Challenges Centered on Music as an Unexamined Subject at Grade 7

A primary school teacher (participant 3) alluded,

Handiitiche music, handitiche kana zvangu... Music haina basa dai iine basa yainyorwa pamaexams egrade 7.

Directly translated, these words mean:

I don't teach music. No. Not at all. Music is a useless subject, if it were useful, then it would be examinable at grade 7.

Participant 4 articulated the same point saying:

If our ministry had made music an examined subject as in secondary school level, then the issue of non-teaching could come to an end. Our Ordinary Level students wrote music as one of the practical exams and now the O' Level teachers take it seriously, they teach a once ignored subject...

Lack of Priority for Music

Music is not important in the primary school curriculum, being unexamined, it does not yield results in examinations. It is better for us to teach the important subjects such as Mathematics, English, Environmental Science, Social Studies and Religion. We give music little or no time.

as perceived by participant 7.

Lack of Teacher Training

As emphasized by one of the interviewed teachers (participant 3),

Muziki yacho hatina kuidzidza, hatiizive saka zvinobhowa kudzidzisa chausina kudzidza nezvacho

meaning

We have not been trained in music, we are uninformed about it, so it is boring to teach something you have not learnt about.

Lack of Knowledge

Along this vein, one teacher, (participant 5) revealed the following in an interview:

We are not conversant with music and none of us knows about it. It's now a foreign subject, worsened by the name, 'Visual performing arts', a term that is unfamiliar to us and whose meaning is so hidden that there is not even a single word that we know about.

Lack of Time to Teach Music

As connoted in participant 1's words,

Nguva yedu yagara haikwane kudzidzisa zvidzidzo zvose zvepazuva
kusanganisira iyo music yacho

meaning

There is always insufficient time to cater for allotted subjects in the teaching day.

Participant 4 also elucidated on the insufficiency of time,

There are ten subjects in the curriculum; each allocated 30 minutes on the timetable. With so many subjects, music runs the probability of being left untaught in a day whilst other subjects are given prominence.

DISCUSSION

Quite a number of challenges backed the non-teaching of music in Masvingo's three primary schools of this research. The study firstly found that teachers faced challenges with the new curriculum that includes music as Visual and Performing Arts under its respective branches. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education provided the area of Visual and Performing Arts in the new curriculum. Music has been covered under the branch Visual and Performing Arts and its five perspectives namely; music, dance, visual arts, theater and visual displays. Teachers find the new Visual and Performing Arts curriculum as non-concrete and thus difficult to decipher and to comprehend.

Secondly there are challenges arising from the taking of music subject by non-specialized teachers. Primary school teachers in Zimbabwe are obliged to teach music, yet they have not been trained in the subject. This presents a challenge as teachers are not confident enough to

teach a subject when they have general knowledge on the subject. This was also revealed in a study by Welch and Henley (2014) when music in England was taught by non-specialist teachers who also lacked confidence in the music subject.

Thirdly, absence of music textbooks is also a common challenge. Music textbooks are helpful in teaching values, cultures and educational levels Wang (2017). They also act as reference points and memory boosters for students. UNESCO (2016) contends that in tallying with a well engaged and prepared teacher, the most effective way to advance learning and instruction is sufficient quantities of well-designed textbooks. On the contrary, the findings exhibited that teachers and their students were deficient of music textbooks and students mainly relied teachers' explanations. Findings agree with studies by Wang (2017) and Mwila (2015) in Zambian primary schools.

Fourthly, lack of physical resources such as music rooms and suitable space for teaching music was a very deep seated challenge in the study of music and arts. In resemblance, these findings auger well with studies by Russel-Bowie (2009) in the Namibian new music and arts curriculum. In some studies physical facilities have been acknowledged as influential in students' academic performance. Another study by Akomolafe and Adesua (2016) for example, comprehended a significant relationship between students' academic and performance and physical resources.

Lastly, lack of educator support in Visual and Performing arts is a matter that results in the non-teaching of music. Teachers claimed that there are lots of concepts covered under music therefore need for support from the professional community as well as financial aid. Primary school teachers hardly get necessary support hence negligence of the subject. As supported in research by Van Jansen Vauren (2012), music teachers in South Africa lacked a variety of support systems such as the school leadership, ministry of Education, fellow educationists and even parents for a successful delivery of musical skills. The situation of very little support persisted and it was only in 2012 that a slight improvement could be realized in the teaching of Arts and Culture in the Vryheid District.

Teachers' overload with work leads to non-teaching of music. Kornhaber and Krechevsky (2002) in their studies ricochet that the primary school curriculum in most schools is crowded therefore learners' priority for the arts is low. Furthermore, the arts are usually the first set of subjects to be left off the timetable.

Additionally, the issue of music as an unexamined subject at grade 7 perpetrates non-teaching. Teachers believe that other subjects such as Mathematics, languages and content subjects that are examined at grade 7 are more important than music. In a desire to make their pupils excel in the exams, they have a mere disregard of music, giving much attention to all examinable subjects and end up avoiding teaching music. Ganyata observed that non-teaching of music is common experience; music is not examined and given non-prominence resulting mostly in only occasional, or non-teaching. For Ganyata, non-teaching of music is recurrent in Southern African countries including Zimbabwe and Botswana, Music is not examinable in Zimbabwe, while in

Botswana it is marginalized since there is a lack of understanding of its importance (Ganyata, 2015).

The challenge of prioritization for music has been emphasized in research by Lean (1997). Teachers allot some importance to the subjects they teach and music is allotted very little importance. In primary schools, teachers have nine subjects to teach in the day, and also other tasks such as guiding students in sporting activities, mentoring and preparation of records. The priority can be allocated to any other subject and activity outside music.

From observations in this research, lack of teacher training is an issue and there is a lack of quality training for the music subject in Visual and Performing Arts resulting in non-teaching. Teachers taking students through music are not equipped and educated enough to impart skills in that area. In a study by Sianagowa (2013) there is reference to the challenge of insufficient teacher training, claiming that globally, there is need for teachers with specific training that meets the unique challenges of teaching music.

Lack of knowledge about music as a subject is also another challenge that holds back and perpetrates the non-teaching of music in the three primary schools. It has been discovered by some scholars that teachers feel confident and knowledgeable about other subject but not music. As exemplified in the studies by (Welch and Henley, 2014; Holden and Button, 2006), in support of this research's findings, teachers feel uncertain about music knowledge, matter and content thereby lacking motivation and confidence to teach the subject.

Teachers also claim that there is not enough time in the teaching day thus driving teachers into non-teaching of music. Institutes that exercise effective time management skills are usually high goal achievers as Adejo (2012) maintains and such effective time management is necessary for schools in achieving curriculum goals and objectives. However, schools under study lack time end up neglecting arts subjects such as music. Lack of time and insufficiency of time in the teaching day has been an issue under scholarly lens of Roulston (1997). Russell-Bowie (2009) also viewed Namibian schools as sufferers of this challenge.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to establish the challenges contributing to non-teaching of music in primary schools of Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The challenges acknowledged are mainly related to the curriculum, absence of music textbooks, lack of music classrooms and venues for teaching and lack of priority for music.

Based on the findings of this research, the following are the recommendations put forward. There is need for curriculum developers to assist in making revisions and interpretations of the curriculum for training of the trainee teacher and in-service training for the qualified teacher so as to equip them with the concepts in music and Visual and Performing arts. The schools that do

not have music specialists could possibly seek assistance from professionals in the area of Visual and Performing Arts.

Additionally, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education could possibly organize in service training and skills upgrading short courses to unpack and make the curriculum really practical to teachers. Also, if music is to be taken seriously, it could possibly be made examinable at all grades especially Grade 7 level.

Furthermore, the school heads should supply resources such as textbooks, music houses and musical instruments for practical aspects of the subject. Teachers should prioritize music through valid time management for all timetabled subjects. Whilst the results of this study supplement literature on the challenges contributing towards the non-teaching of music in Zimbabwe, they are limited to three schools and seven music teachers in Masvingo and are not representative of all Zimbabwean schools and elsewhere. In spite of these and other possible confines, the results were thought-provoking and indicate some important possibilities for future research. Future studies should include a larger number of schools throughout Zimbabwe, a larger sample of teachers to further authenticate the results of the study. The most significant contribution of this study is perhaps that it divulges pragmatic knowledge on challenges leading into the non-teaching of music in Zimbabwe. It is hoped that the findings will motivate new research on the possible solution to the non-teaching of music in Zimbabwean primary schools.

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