



## **Uncovering the state of music education in rural South African FP schools: Voices of education students**

**Prof Eurika Jansen van Vuuren**

University of Mpumalanga, South Africa, Email: [Eurika.jvvuuren@ump.ac.za](mailto:Eurika.jvvuuren@ump.ac.za)

### **Abstract**

The study investigates the neglect of music education in rural South African Foundation Phase schools, despite these areas being described as the country's "Cultural Heartland." Although schools are expected to nurture local culture and heritage, music—central to cultural identity—is largely absent from teaching practice. While the decline of music education has been noted previously, its causes and extent remain underexplored. This study examines the reasons for the absence of music education using a pragmatic paradigm and a mixed-methods approach that incorporates Métissage to foreground an African perspective. Data were gathered from 80 second-year students through baseline assessments of prior music knowledge and from 17 fourth-year students via open-ended questionnaires on their Teaching Practice experiences. Findings reveal limited knowledge of both traditional African and Western music, including poor understanding of basic musical elements. As these elements are universal across musical cultures, their absence indicates that music education is not being adequately nurtured in schools. The study concludes that insufficient pre-service teacher training sustains this neglect and calls for a fundamental rethinking of music education training.

**Keywords:** Generalist educators, music education, pre-service teachers, Foundation Phase, teacher training

### **Background**

Despite the positive impact of music education on young children, Life Skills (LS), as a Foundation Phase (FP) subject that encompasses music education, is not receiving the attention it deserves. This seems to be a global phenomenon as elucidated in a study by Bautista et al., (2022) who attribute the lack of readiness amongst early childhood Educators in the area of music education to three main causes, the lack of proper music education in schools, the limited time dedicated to music education in teacher training programmes and finally the low quality of music education curricula at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The Bautista et al. (2022) study refers to the situation in the United States, Australia, Brazil, Greece, Kenya, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The South African situation is similar, with Jansen van Vuuren (2018, p.88) stating that generalist Foundation Phase teachers have a "lack of sufficient and creative music training during the school years result(ing) in pre-service educators with no music foundation." This state of affairs removes an important teaching tool from a teacher's toolbox.

Music is a valuable subject that can support the teaching and learning of complex subjects such as Mathematics and Languages, but it has been diminished in importance and is often considered an add-on for entertainment, with no true music education being present. Music is not only fun but also improves brain development and enhances capabilities such as reading and solving mathematical problems. This opinion is also used by Alam and Mohanty

(2023) who says besides music being fun, it assists in brain development and develops skills needed for reading and mathematics. In some schools, the allocated time for LS in general, and music in particular is used to teach Mathematics or Languages to improve students' poor performance in these subjects. This action is against the prescriptions of the CAPS, which prescribes 6 hours per week for Grades R to 2 and 7 hours for Grade 3 for the Life Skills subject (CAPS, Foundation Phase Life Skills 2011) as can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Teaching hour allocation in FP*

SUBJECT	GRADE R (HOURS)	GRADES 1-2 (HOURS)	GRADE 3 (HOURS)
Home Language	10	8/7	8/7
First Additional Language		2/3	3/4
Mathematics	7	7	7
Life Skills	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
• Beginning Knowledge	(1)	(1)	(2)
• Creative Arts	(2)	(2)	(2)
• Physical Education	(2)	(2)	(2)
• Personal and Social Well-being	(1)	(1)	(1)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>

Musical knowledge contributes towards a high-quality education (Ruokonen, Tervaniemi & Reunamo, 2021) and with the necessary knowledge, education, and support to implement it efficiently, music education can add the value that is evident. There is a rich music tradition in South Africa, especially in various Black African cultures, yet music education is not getting the attention necessary to build on the cultural music wealth and to assist in elevating the level of early childhood education.

There is a global consensus about the positive effect of music education on children (Blasco-Magraner, Bernabe-Valero, Marín-Liébaná, & Moret-Tatay, 2021; Váradi, 2022; Sala & Gobet, 2020). The advantage of using music as a tool to improve schooling is observable in several policies focussing on education and the development of children in the South African realm. The National Development Plan Vision 2030 (2013) highlights the benefits of music education and views the Arts as a foundational skill that can help improve the South African schooling system. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), (CAPS, 2011, p. 9) acknowledges the possibilities lying within the Arts, and particularly in music, “to create a foundation for balanced creative, cognitive, emotional and social development.” Despite the importance of music education being preached in schools and government policies, many South African FP teachers are not teaching music, and several reasons for this are provided in the literature, including insufficient knowledge caused by inadequate pre-service and in-service training (Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021; Cloete & Delpport, 2015). Some researchers have outlined the training and knowledge required by FP teachers to provide music education (Culp & Salvador, 2021; Bautista, Yeung, McLaren & Ilari, 2024), but very few have explored the background and context of pre-service teaching, where the root of the problem most likely lies.

To offer all South African children the benefits of musical education, a more concerted effort is required, especially from universities, to stop the cycle of music education neglect. The improvement of music education in schools will need to come from newly trained

generalist teachers who have been empowered with the necessary knowledge and skills, as well as having had enough learning time to ensure retention of skills and confidence.

The positive impact of music reaches beyond the actual educational aspect, to also include social, emotional and cognitive development, amongst others. The social impact of music education can be seen in the interaction during the use of music in classrooms, such as rhythmic activities, and instrumental playing and singing, which provides children with the opportunity to communicate in various ways, verbally and non-verbally. Song on its own can be regarded as a form of communication due to the message that the lyrics are communicating. Communication through sound also takes place when children create accompaniment or do improvisations using musical instruments. This form of musical communication starts even before a child starts to speak since they use a variety of sounds to communicate their feelings of comfort, discomfort, hunger, etc. The communication facet of music can be seen when mothers sing to their children, and the children respond with their sounds (Ruokonen, Tervaniemi, & Reunamo, 2021). Music can invoke and portray emotion, especially during active *musicking* (the practical involvement in playing music).

The emotional impact of music is evident in activities such as playing instruments, singing, responding to music being played, etc., and it often helps children to understand the feelings of the participants in their group (Rus, Dohotaru, Catalano, H., Ani-Rus, & Mestic, 2024). . This can be verified through the results of tests that measure the understanding of the nature of emotion among children, and that show that participants in music programmes have surpassed their age groups in terms of emotional development (Boucher, et al., 2021). With the understanding of emotions, empathy is practised as observed when teaching children to use instruments or voices to convey emotions (Fletcher, Davidson, & Krause, 2024; Boucher et al., 2021).

When children are actively involved in *musicking*, they learn to adapt and accommodate other children through sharing musical instruments, through being together in ensemble work, and also when they work together to achieve an aesthetic result. Due to the development of more accommodating behaviour, they do not display a strong desire to dominate their peers. Instead, they cooperate when creating music together and are less competitive for attention from the teacher or facilitator. This positivity can be attributed to increased feelings of security when they attend music education programmes with other children they know, and who they are comfortable with (Boucher et al., 2021; Ritblatt, et al., 2013).

Through being more adaptable and interacting with other children, music education assists learners in developing friendships with their peers and also being more accepting of adult decisions (Ritblatt, et al., 2013) like when they are guided in ensemble work.

An early childhood programme infused with music education helps to reinforce not only social skills but also has an effect on adaptability and self-regulation (socio-emotional) skills, which are needed for children to be successful in school and to be prepared and ready to learn (Ritblatt, et al. 2013).

Musicking is important for young children since it brings about joy, happiness and contentment as well as being seen as less sad, angry or depressed, meaning that they associate music with positivity, eagerness to learn and well-being. Such an elevated mood inspires more accommodating behaviour, which in turn fosters cooperative and harmonious interactions as a result (Reukonen et al. 2021; Ritblatt, et al. 2013). It is universally acknowledged that music education provides enriched, creative, and colourful learning experiences with positive outcomes (Yunkun, 2024). Cognitive development, which includes memory development is

stimulated by music education since studies have shown that children can remember songs they heard even before birth (Poćwierz-Marciniak, & Harciarek, 2021). This means that music education has a strong positive result on a child's brain function and how they integrate learning, since it is often through playful and creative music activities, that cognitive development is taking place. Reukonen's (2021) and Ritblatt's (2013) studies have found that music education promotes specific cognitive skills such as abstract reasoning. In addition, their research indicates improvement in hearing, attention, and spatial perception skills in children who participate in music education.

Children who have been participating in group music activities, especially singing, from an early age, showed better cognitive and self-regulation skills at ages 4 and 5, than their counterparts, which then has the extra benefit in that they need less educational leadership to learn successfully (Boucher et.al., 2021; Brown, Blumenthal, & Allen, 2022). The enigma remains that despite the research and positive results associated with music activities, music education is not embraced by teachers to improve South African education. The following sections will address some of the key reasons behind this deficit.

The aim of this research was thus to explore the reasons for music education dwindling in most rural schools. The research question investigates why music education is languishing in rural South African FP schools, with sub-questions focusing on the general challenges impacting music education, policy requirements, prior knowledge of students, FP teacher training and what the students see in schools.

### **Methodology**

Métissage was used as a research methodology, drawing on multiple sources, perspectives, and disciplines to generate new knowledge and insights, and is well-suited to the African context. Mitchell, Phillips, Trail, Walsh, Bickel, Bartley, and McConachy (2020, p. 49) regard Métissage as a "collaborative inquiry across contemplative traditions and arts disciplines [which] can open spaces for compassionate and heartfelt transformation in communal, personal, spiritual, and political realms." These notions reverberate positively with an art form such as music which needs to be integrated into education through not only considering what is prescribed by policy but also listening to the voices of young Africans who come from a background where music is an integral part of their social context.

The Métissage methodology was supported by a pragmatic paradigm and social constructivism framework, as outlined by MacKenzie and Knipe (2006), as a focus on actions along with their consequences and being problem-centred, pluralistic, and real-world practice-oriented.

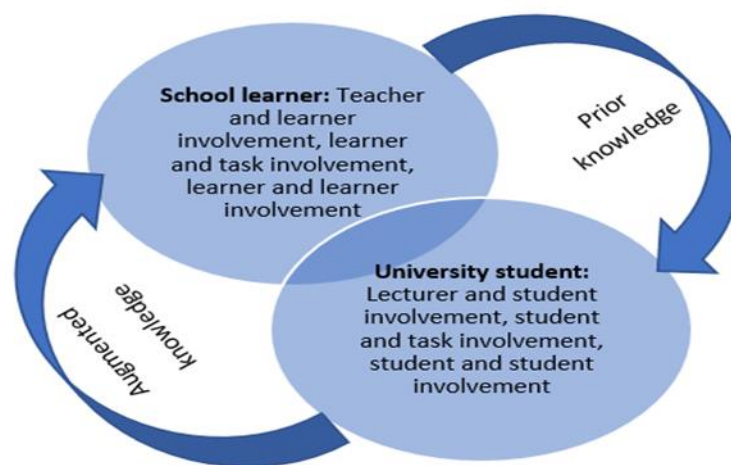
The literature was explored to provide a background to the study. The CAPS (2011) document for LS in Grades R to 3 was studied to ascertain what teachers are required to know, to be able to teach music education efficiently. To ensure triangulation, 17 fourth-year students (P1 – P17) completed open-ended questionnaires to share their music education experiences at schools during their time of being Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) FP students. In addition, the researcher, who is a lecturer for music education, administered an online baseline assessment to 80 second-year students, before the start of the music module, at a university situated in a rural context. Students were informed that the baseline assessment was voluntary and would be used for two purposes: firstly, to determine the knowledge of music gained and retained during their school years, and secondly to obtain data for research. All participants were informed of their rights and asked to sign letters of consent.

The credibility of the online baseline assessment was ensured using the Lockdown Browser application and shuffled questions, which limits dishonesty through copying. These

anonymous questionnaires were assessed by the Moodle learning management system, whereafter a data analysis was done using Excel to obtain information about the level and extent of students' knowledge. The data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires was compiled, coded and presented in narrative form. Finally, the researcher's knowledge gained during the observation, and assessment of students during Teaching Practice over 10 years, augments the study.

### Theoretical framework

The social constructivism framework advocates for the interaction of teacher and student, student and task, and student and student (Vygotsky, 1978) and is apparent in the type of interactions taking place in the classroom. This social constructivism framework for learning (Vygotsky, 1978) is graphically represented in Figure 1, as it was adapted to align with this study.



**Figure 1.** Context-aligned social constructivist framework (Vygotsky, 1978)

### Literature

The literature search was focused on the following research sub-questions: ‘What are the general challenges impacting music education in schools?’ ‘What does government policy require?’ and ‘What is the current situation in FP teacher training for music?’

#### *Historical injustice*

Baxen and Botha (2016) review initial teacher training in South Africa between 1994 and 2014 and highlight the deep inequalities that existed before the 1994 democratic election. Teacher education was racially segregated, with white students accessing better-resourced colleges and universities, higher entry requirements, and longer training programmes. White Foundation Phase (FP) teachers were typically trained over three to four years at colleges of education that emphasised strong content knowledge, practical skills, and effective didactics, with a holistic focus on child development. Practical subjects such as the Arts and Physical Education received sufficient time for skill development, enabling graduates to enter classrooms with confidence and competence.

In contrast, African and Coloured teachers completed shorter two-year certificates after Grade 8 or 10, and later three-year diplomas, which Baxen (2016) found to be inadequate. After 1994, teacher training was relocated to universities to raise standards. However, many universities lacked expertise in Early Childhood Education or did not offer FP programmes. This shift resulted in B.Ed. FP courses that prioritised Mathematics and Languages while

neglecting holistic development, particularly Life Skills (LS), which includes the Arts. Although content knowledge in core subjects may have improved, the reduced emphasis on the Arts weakened an essential tool for effective FP teaching, contradicting CAPS (2011, p. 8), which positions LS as supporting Languages and Mathematics.

### ***Music education inequity***

For many years, African children experienced inferior schooling compared to white children, who received more specialised and holistic education that included the Arts. Holistic development in schools is achieved through all subjects, particularly Life Skills (LS), which is central to CAPS (2011) and supports learners' social, personal, intellectual, emotional, and physical development.

Historical inequalities in music education were also influenced by financial factors, as many white children could afford private music tuition in addition to school-based instruction. As a result, they often left school with solid foundational music skills, which benefited those who later entered the teaching profession. White Foundation Phase (FP) student teachers in former training colleges were required to study music didactics, piano and recorder, voice development, Orff instruments, basic music theory, and age-appropriate repertoire.

### ***Insufficient knowledge***

When visiting FP students during their Teaching Practice (TP) at schools in rural Mpumalanga, the lack of music education in schools was evident through the absence of musical sounds and activities, apart from a limited repertoire of songs sung by classes in most schools. Studies by Boucher (2021), Reukonen (2021) and Ritblatt (2013) provide a reason for this by saying that the low quality or total absence of music education in FP schools can be attributed to educators who acknowledge the importance of music education in early childhood, but experience a lack of musical skills, which challenges the provision of sufficient music education.

### ***No dedicated spaces and resources***

The absence of dedicated music venues and music teaching resources such as posters and musical instruments (bought or hand-made) might add to the perception that generalist teachers in the FP are not teaching music.

### ***No mentoring by in-service teachers***

In informal discussions with students, most pre-service teachers acknowledge that they have never seen a music class being taught during their TP visits to schools. This lack of music mentoring impacts the quality of teachers who are about to enter the workforce, and ultimately results in the perpetuation of little to no music education in many rural schools across South Africa. The situation in more affluent schools presents a contrasting picture, with music education being given a high priority and generalist teachers often being supported by music specialists, paid for by the parents.

### ***CAPS policy requirements***

CAPS remains the constant guiding curriculum in South African education, and improving music education requires university programmes to allocate sufficient time for pre-service teachers to acquire the basic knowledge needed to teach CAPS effectively. Strengthening music education depends on newly trained teachers who have both solid music skills and the confidence to teach, particularly within CAPS's requirement for integrated learning and subject-specific didactics such as music.

Although the National Curriculum Statement Grades R–12 emphasises social transformation and redressing past educational imbalances (DBE, 2011, p. 4), this goal is hindered by many teachers' limited skills and knowledge. There is also uncertainty about the appropriate scope and level of music training, with debates between CAPS-focused and more holistic approaches. In the South African context, however, broader holistic training alone has not enabled new teachers to teach music confidently. Instead, pre-service teachers need more time to master CAPS music content and develop sustained musicking skills, as CAPS outlines the basic music elements learners should have acquired since its introduction in 2011.

### ***Teacher training***

#### *Pre-service preparation in music education of B.Ed. FP teachers*

The CAPS (2011) curriculum requires integrated teaching and for that to succeed, a combination of music content knowledge and an understanding of the subtle differences, and didactics of integration is essential.

#### *Generalist training without specializations*

FP teachers at HEIs in South Africa are not given the option to specialize, and as generalists, they have to teach all four subjects offered in schools: Mathematics, Home Language, English First Additional Language and then the compounded LS subject.

#### *Training in music education for pre-service B.Ed. FP teachers*

An analysis of credit allocations and levels for Life Skills (LS) music in Foundation Phase B.Ed. programmes across South African universities reveals significant inconsistencies in time and content. These differences leave some pre-service teachers underprepared for the demands of schools, particularly where music is allocated minimal time within combined Arts modules. At the study site, only six hours of a semester-long Arts module are devoted to music, reinforcing low levels of music knowledge.

Short course durations limit the integration of academic and practical components (De Villiers, 2017, p.182), and there is often weak alignment between curriculum development and teacher education (Aróstegui & Kyakuwa, 2021, p.30). Given that music education requires specialised knowledge, more intensive training and sufficient time are necessary to strengthen music teaching outcomes in South African schools.

## **Findings**

The general challenges impacting music education in schools, policy requirements, and the situation in pre-service training were addressed through the literature. This section focuses on the collected data to answer the following research sub-questions; 'What prior music knowledge do students possess?' and 'What were the observations made by final-year students?'

### ***Prior knowledge of pre-service students***

The baseline assessment completed by 80 students consisted of a mix of writing, and full-colour pictures or graphics, with multiple-choice options as answers. The results obtained indicate the prior knowledge that these pre-service students had before starting their music module and are presented below in Table 2. Please note that question 21 was erroneously omitted from the questionnaire and therefore does not appear in the result list. All questions that scored below 50%, are highlighted.

**Table 2***Knowledge levels regarding music*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Results</b>
Q1 Beat definition	16 (20%)
Q2 Rhythm definition	36 (45%)
Q3 Tempo definition	66 (82,5%)
Q4 Timbre definition	29 (36,25%)
Q5 Semibreve identification	31 (38,75%)
Q6 Minim identification	26 (32,5%)
Q7 Crotchet identification	28 (35%)
Q8 Quaver identification	24 (30%)
Q9 Pitch definition	56 (70%)
Q10 White keys on keyboard	16 (20%)
Q11 Solfa hand signs	12 (15%)
Q12 Unison singing definition	22 (27,5%)
Q13 Round singing definition	36 (45%)
Q14 Call and response song	61 (76,25%)
Q15 Time signature 4/4	17 (21,25%)
Q16 Time signature 3/4	20 (25%)
Q17 Time signature 2/4	45 (56,25%)
Q18 Note Taa	27 (33,75%)
Q19 Note Taa-aa	16 (20%)
Q20 Note Ta-te	20 (25%)
Q21 DELETED	DELETED
Q22 Note Taa-aa-aa-aa	21 (26,25%)
Q23 Treble clef identification	32 (40%)
Q24 Semibreve rest identification	23 (28,75%)
Q25 Minim rest identification	30 (37,5%)
Q26 Crotchet rest identification	16 (20%)
Q27 Quaver rest identification	21 (26,25%)
Q28 Mbira/Kalimba identification	29 (36,25%)
Q29 Djembe identification	7 (8,75%)
Q30 Ankle rattles identification	63 (78,75%)
Q31 Umrube/uhadi identification	37 (46,25%)
Q32 Cow bell identification	39 (48,75%)
Q33 Marimba identification	32 (40%)
Q34 Shekere identification	38 (47,5%)
Q35 Violin identification	46 (57,5%)
Q36 Pianoforte identification	34 (42,5%)
Q37 Organ identification	25 (31,25%)
Q38 Guitar identification	66 (82,5%)
Q39 Harmonica identification	37 (46,25%)
Q40 Trumpet identification	53 (66,25%)
Q41 Keyboard identification	38 (47,5%)
Q42 Saxophone identification	33 (41,25%)

## Q43 Panflute identification

46 (57,5%)

In only nine questions (21.4%) out of 42, students achieved more than 50%. Of these questions, three questions achieved outcomes that were below 60%; 2 beat time signatures, violin, and panflute identification. The trumpet identification scored 66,25%. The rest of these questions had outcomes of 70% or more, with 2 being above 80%. The aspects scoring in the 70's were pitch, call and response singing, and the identification of ankle rattles. The tempo definition and the guitar identification scored above 80%.

Many inferences can be made from the outcomes of the baseline assessment, foremost being that students know very little about the aspects they were supposed to be taught at the school level. This can be due to several factors, including lack of retention of knowledge, not being taught the content as required in the CAPS curriculum, or language inadequacy in understanding the questions.

The lowest outcome of the baseline test was for the identification of the djembe drum which was 8,75%. Being one of the drums often used in African choirs and at the school level, this low score was surprising. Interestingly, other African aspects also scored under 50%, including the identification of the mbira, uhadi, cow bell, marimba and shekere. It must be noted that all these instruments were described by more than one name in the questionnaire to make sure that all students understood clearly what they were. Other traditional African music elements such as call and response singing (76,25%), and ankle rattles (78,75%) did well, which could indicate that it was often used in their communities and schools.

The researcher was under the impression that the students (all of African descent) would know the African instruments that feature in traditional musical styles and genres of sub-Saharan Africa, but that was not the case. When pre-service students arrive for their teacher training, it can thus be expected that they will have limited knowledge, even in their traditional music and will need intensive training in all elements of music to be able to teach what is required by CAPS at the FP level.

### ***Final year students' thoughts about music education***

Findings obtained from the 17 fourth-year students' open-ended questionnaires are presented in this section, in alignment with the questions asked.

*Question 1:* Tell me about the music education lessons you have witnessed during your 4 years of TP and Work Integrated Learning (WIL).

Most of the participants (P9, P14, P 15) do not recall ever witnessing a music lesson being taught during their TP and WIL. *"In all the four years going for TP I have never seen any music lessons being presented. Even the lessons or their subjects, there is no music incorporated in them which makes learning for children to be dull and boring"* (P8). Participant 15 provides an opinion about the lack of music education lessons by saying *"[t]he schools I have visited seem to not understand teaching music. They lack knowledge and experience."*

Participant 12 added another perspective by saying *"From the school I attend TP, there are no educational lessons about music. However, they do music, they participate in the competitions around the district to international. In other words, they only do music if there are competitions to attend."* It is evident that music competitions are relatively popular music activities and that they are most probably replacing music education lessons. This inference can be made since most rural African schools do not offer extra-curricular activities where music practice can take place, so students would practice during school time.

Participant 4 was the only one who was able to report having seen music being used in the class and added that *“South Africa is very rich in music and rhythm. I have witnessed teachers and student teachers use music as an introductory lesson, ice breaker or establish prior knowledge through music.”* In this instance, the student refers to music being used as an introduction, ice breaker or hook as referred to by Russell-Bowie (2009a, p. 5) as *“service connections.”* The service connection model refers to a subject being taught and an activity from another subject being used to assist with retention.

Participant 13 refers to his attempts at incorporating music into the lesson by saying *“I get to experience music education when introducing lessons during TP. Most subjects do not incorporate music education. Learners must join the choir for such experience.”* Here again, the choir is perceived as music education, although it is not an experience common among all South African learners. This observation by the student is a picture also seen by the researcher during school visits where no music education is evident. The remainder of the participants referred to their mainly positive experiences during music education lectures, rather than to what they witnessed at schools, indicating that they misunderstood the question.

Although participation in choir competitions was evident at several schools, the absence of music education as a subject in its own right, was very obvious. When music is used during a lesson, it is usually an augmentation of the lesson through song, rather than music education where something specific is taught.

*Question 2: How many music lessons have you presented during the four years of study?*

One student (P2) reported that she had taught approximately 15 music lessons, but it is not clear whether the student regarded the inclusion of a song in a lesson as a music education lesson. This was the only student reporting having participated in such a high number of music lessons. Participant 13 mentioned 5 music lessons and participants 3 and 8 mentioned 2 music lessons being taught. P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P10 and P17 mentioned having taught one lesson each and P9, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16 have never taught a music lesson during TP.

It is evident that pre-service teachers are not being provided with the opportunity to teach music during their TP and WIL experience, since the subject to be taught is usually prescribed by the university.

*Question 3: Is this scenario where music is not taught or not taught properly, similar to what you experienced when you were at school?*

Eight students stated that they experienced a scenario where music was not taught or not taught properly during their schooling years (P2, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13). *“Traditional classrooms were conducted during my schooling; the focus was not on music”* (P4). Participant 4 thus regards traditional teaching as not including music education. Some responses were, *“[m]usic was not taught properly since it was not considered to have its own time/lesson specifically”* (P2) and *“the only singing time is assembly in the morning”* (P6).

At the school where P2 did her schooling, music was not allocated a specific timeslot on the timetable – showing disregard for the curriculum and especially the music. P8 agrees and remarks that there was no music taught at the schools where he was. This lack of music education is evident in a large number of schools.

However, in contrast, eight students reported positive music experiences during their school careers (P1, P3, P5, P7, P11, P14, P15, P16). Some responses were, *“I was exposed to music in my school years”* (P5). *“My teacher sang every day nicely with learners”* (P7). P7

regards music education as singing, rather than the full spectrum which could indicate that the student does not really know what is encompassed in music education.

P9 avers that music and Visual Arts were not an option at school – “*we were taught dance and drama only and left music and Visual Arts.*” Schools do have the choice in the secondary phase to offer only two art forms. The choices offered will depend on the specialists available or as is the case in most schools will land on the shoulders of a generalist teacher. No answer was received from P17.

*Question 4: What can be done to improve the situation with music education at schools?*

Several themes were found as far as improving the music education situation.

*Music competitions and choirs:*

*“I think teacher can create music competition so that learners can engage in those competitions and get lessons about music because some are talented in music, so it can help them pursue their dream of music” (P1, P2, P3).*

Mentions of choirs could most probably be linked to music competitions because schools enter their choirs for the annual South African Schools Choral Eisteddfod (SASCE). In the researcher’s experience, choir teaching skills are often transferred from older teachers and students’ own choir singing experiences. Due to the crowded curriculum, the university where the study took place, does not include choir teaching in the music education module.

*Attitude*

Two students considered the attitude of teachers about music as being detrimental. *“Have teachers who are passionate about music” (P3).* One student breached the topic of ignorance regarding the benefits of music amongst teachers by saying *“Firstly, teachers at schools do not take music seriously because they do not know its significance” (P9).*

*Teacher development through pre-service training*

*“Training programmes in tertiary education should emphasize music education in the FP. Students should be having a music lecture and have practices with different instruments, this will enhance the students’ interest in music” (P17).* Interestingly, only one student sought the solution for better-trained music educators, in pre-service training. This could mean that many students do not understand the importance of appropriate pre-service training to promote better music education.

*Teacher development through in-service training*

Students were very vocal about the importance of in-service training in music education. *“Include teacher development programmes” (P4).* *“Teachers need to be given proper training about teaching music, and they should be educated about its importance and its role in a child’s life” (P9 and P11).* *“Teachers need to be taught about the significance of music education” (P11).* *“Teachers should attend extra classes or workshops for music” (P14).* It could be inferred that this participant believes that in-service training could not only benefit music knowledge but also change perceptions.

Very few students referred to pre-service training as being enhanced and rather focused on in-service training for knowledge development.

*School and DBE responsibility*

Many students blamed timetabling as a factor that impeded music education. *“Timetabling. I think schools should introduce more lessons about music”* (P5). *“One period for learning to sing once per week”* (P7 and P8). The suggested timetabling already exists, but teachers do not adhere to it as they often forego this lesson to spend time on Mathematics and Languages.

Others suggest curriculum changes which can only be made by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), *“Have a musical programme as a school curriculum”* (P6). *“I think changes or adjustments should be made to the curriculum”* (P8). However, a suitable music education curriculum already exists but it is not being implemented. It is also clear that these participants do not have an understanding of the lengthy processes involved in changing a curriculum.

It was widely agreed that including music education in LS was ineffective. Music should be a free-standing subject and be removed from LS (P8, P11, P15). The researcher agrees that even something cosmetic, like separating the music subject from LS, can bring back the credibility of music education since it will not be lost in the complex structure of LS.

One suggestion that *“[i]t can be done as an extra subject and the ones who want to participate, will participate”* (P16), does not make much pedagogical sense since it would then mean that a group of learners will not have the opportunity to learn something new.

### *Resources*

This subtheme focussed primarily on the provision of a variety of musical instruments to do more practical work (P3, P8). Participant 2 mentioned that *“[w]e did not use the correct instruments.”* This statement refers to what was taught in the module, but what the participant means is not clear. It is essential to note that there is a variety of mainly percussion instruments available at the university, but there is not adequate time to learn to utilize these instruments fully.

Students say that schools need to purchase a variety of musical instruments (P8, P10, P17) and that *“[t]hey must try to introduce new instruments which learners are not familiar with”* (P5). However, simple instruments can be created from recyclable materials, which means bought instruments are not vital to teaching music and a lack of resources can be overcome through teacher interest and innovation. Many universities in South Africa do include the making of percussion instruments in their courses.

### *Question 5: How can the music education module here at university be improved?*

Interestingly, students had similar ideas for improving music education at schools, and universities.

### *Music competitions*

Two students mentioned music competitions such as talent shows as a means to improve music education at the university level (P4, P1). *“I think in our university they can create music competitions where students can engage themselves into it. They will get more knowledge of music to get into those competitions”* (P1). Students share this sentiment because that is an element of music that they were exposed to at the school level.

### *Teaching time*

Giving more teaching time to the module is a general suggestion (P2, P3, P8, P10, P15). *“More exposure and adequate time.”* (P13). *“Students must first be introduced when they are still doing their first year until they reach their final year, in that way music may be*

improved” (P5). “I do not think it needs improvement, rather an extra lecturer for specifically music as an extracurricular activity” (P14). “There should be a special module for music education” (P11, P12). Students at the university where the research took place saw all the Arts modules crammed into one module and thus have a good understanding of the limited time it provides for music education. Students would like to spend more time using the musical instruments (P4, P9) and less time doing theory (P9, P16). Unfortunately, a lecturer’s teaching style is often governed by time allocation – the more time available in the curriculum, the more musicking could be included.

#### *Dedicated venue*

The students share the frustration of the researcher, not having a dedicated venue for music where all students can participate in practical work when they say “[a]t the university level music should be taken serious and have studio or theatre for embracing the talent of music” (P6) and “[t]he music module here at university can be improved by the university creating a music studio where students will attend because attending lectures at a lecture hall makes students to be disengaged” (P11). It is important to note that music taught in a suitable venue during pre-service training will also serve as modelling for a class organization when working with instruments. This is unfortunately not possible when teaching in a theatre-style lecture hall.

#### *Question 6: Do you think music education is necessary? Why?*

This question received the most detailed responses from the students and thus it can be inferred that pre-service teachers realize the importance of music education in providing positive learning experiences in a different mode, such as music. All 17 participants answered yes to question 6 and provided a variety of reasons.

#### *Music as emotive communication*

Several participants mentioned the stress-relieving power of music through assisting with relieving academic stress and improving learning outcomes (P2, P7, P8). “Music furthermore provides a way to express your feelings” (P1) whilst being “therapeutic and refreshing” (P14). Participant 5 mentioned the way that achievements in music can *boost your confidence and help you escape from negative realities*.

#### *Learning styles*

Participants acknowledge that some students are auditory learners and therefore music will be useful to enhance their learning (P17, P2, P9), whilst participant 11 mentions that music education in addition, “will cater for the multiple intelligences of learners.”

#### *Enjoyment*

There is general consent amongst students that learners enjoy music such as singing and rhythms and it makes learning more enjoyable, which could improve performance (P4, P10, P13)

Music is not only limited to the classroom and students often find satisfaction in practising music together: “we enjoy our time when we have gatherings when there is music” (P1) since it “is also fun to do and also a way of proper entertainment” (P8).

#### *Nurturing music talent*

Participant 14 provides an interesting view that music education “would be a good thing for everyone to be exposed to as it will even enable those who cannot sing be able to learn

*new ways of music.*” In other words, music education can provide other music opportunities for people who are not good at singing. When using music education to teach, talented individuals may be discovered, and for some students, it can become a career (P3, P4, P12) “*so it can help them to improve their talent, and they can end up being a celebrity worldwide*” (P7).

Some learners “*may not be skilled in other aspects of learning however they may be good or talented in music*” (P11). In addition, by nurturing music talent during the school years, a “*learner may develop love for music*” (P15). P17 avers that learners who are taught about instruments and have time for musicking, “*will develop their interest in learning music.*” Music education lessons are also an ideal place for children “*to show off their talent or it makes them aware that they have talent*” (P16). It is therefore of extreme importance to teach music education “*to make learners realise their potential*” (P9).

### *General skills development*

Participant 3 mentions the importance of music as providing skills beyond just music, “*it teaches them many things that are not school related.*” Participant 6 makes a profound statement mentioning several skills not mentioned here before. “*Let’s take a look at our national anthem it involves almost all the languages in South Africa. Furthermore, through music we learn about our diversity among us people and our cultures and becoming so inquisitive about the lives of people around us*” (P6). So, it can be said that ‘*[m]usic will give learners an opportunity to discover new skills and develop new skills*’ (P17).

## **Recommendations**

Primary school teachers, as generalists, often lack the skills needed to teach the CAPS music curriculum effectively, highlighting the need for greater emphasis on music education in HEI teacher-training programmes. Allocating sufficient time—ideally two full semesters—would allow for the development of didactics, theory, and essential practical music skills, which require sustained practice to ensure retention and confidence. Without musicking skills, teachers struggle to teach music effectively, as practical experience cannot be replaced by workbooks.

In addition, South African universities should offer short courses for in-service teachers focused on CAPS music curriculum and ensure that all institutions provide adequately timed, curriculum-aligned music training for Foundation Phase pre-service teachers.

## **Conclusion**

This paper investigates the reasons for the neglect of music education in rural South African Foundation Phase (FP) schools, drawing on literature, the researcher’s 10 years of observations, baseline testing of second-year students, and open-ended questionnaires with fourth-year students. The literature identifies key challenges, including historical injustices in teacher training, racial inequities in access to music education, teachers’ insufficient music knowledge, lack of resources and dedicated spaces, and limited mentoring capacity among in-service teachers.

Effective music teaching requires knowledge of basic musical elements, practical musicking skills, and appropriate didactics, as outlined in policy documents such as CAPS. However, students’ limited prior exposure to music, poor knowledge retention, and inconsistent time allocations and levels of music education at universities leave generalist pre-service teachers underprepared to meet CAPS requirements.

Final-year students’ insights echoed the literature while revealing additional concerns: many have never observed or taught a music lesson, some view music as

entertainment rather than education, and nearly half recall little or no music education during their schooling, aside from choir activities. Students suggested reviving music education through choir participation, competitions, in-service training, better timetabling, curriculum adjustments, increased access to instruments, and separating music from Life Skills. To improve university training, they recommended more time for music, increased musicking, participation in competitions, and dedicated music teaching spaces.

Students recognised the value of music education in fostering emotional expression, accommodating diverse learning styles, enhancing enjoyment, nurturing talent, supporting language development, and promoting cultural awareness. The study concludes that ongoing neglect of music education deprives learners of essential cultural skills and that this cycle can only be broken through coordinated efforts by the Department of Education and higher education institutions. Using Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism, the paper argues that inadequate pre-service teacher training disrupts the cycle of music learning, underscoring the need for stronger university-based music education to restore music teaching in South African schools.

### References

- Alam, A., & Mohanty, A. (2023). Music and its effect on mathematical and reading abilities of students: Pedagogy for twenty-first century schools. In *Interdisciplinary perspectives on sustainable development* (pp. 342–346). CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003457619-67>
- Arasomwan, D. A., & Mashiya, N. (2021). Foundation phase pre-service teachers' experiences of teaching life skills during teaching practice. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 11(1), Article a700. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v11i1.700>
- Aróstegui, J. L., & Kyakuwa, J. (2021). Generalist or specialist music teachers? Lessons from two continents. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 122(1), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2020.1746715>
- Bautista, A., Yeung, J., McLaren, M. L., & Ilari, B. (2024). Music in early childhood teacher education: Raising awareness of a worrisome reality and proposing strategies to move forward. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 125(3), 139–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2022.2050357>
- Baxen, J., & Botha, L. J. (2016). Establishing a research agenda for foundation phase initial teacher education: A systematic review (1994–2014). *South African Journal of Education*, 36(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v36n3a1279>
- Blasco-Magraner, J. S., Bernabé-Valero, G., Marín-Liévana, P., & Moret-Tatay, C. (2021). Effects of the educational use of music on 3- to 12-year-old children's emotional development: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(7), 3668. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073668>
- Boucher, H., Gaudette-Leblanc, A., Raymond, J., & Peters, V. (2021). Musical learning as a contributing factor in the development of socio-emotional competence in children aged 4 and 5: An exploratory study in a naturalistic context. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(12), 1922–1938. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2019.1658097>
- Brown, E. D., Blumenthal, M. A., & Allen, A. A. (2022). The sound of self-regulation: Music program relates to an advantage for children at risk. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 60, 126–136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.12.003>
- Cloete, E., & Delpont, A. (2015). Music education in the Grade R classroom: How three teachers learned in a participatory action inquiry. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 5(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v5i1.347>

- Culp, M. E., & Salvador, K. (2021). Music teacher education program practices: Preparing teachers to work with diverse learners. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 30(2), 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057083720958487>
- Department of Basic Education. (2011). National curriculum statement (NCS): Curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) Grades R–12 – Music. Government Printer.
- Department of Education. (2003). National curriculum statement for Grades 10–12 (general): Music. Government Printer.
- De Villiers, R. (2017). A teacher training framework for music education in the foundation phase (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria). University of Pretoria.
- Fletcher, H., Davidson, J. W., & Krause, A. E. (2024). Examining the empathic voice teacher. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 46(2), 337–352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X231189210>
- Jansen van Vuuren, E. N. (2018). Strumming your way into foundation phase education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(2), 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-2-1643>
- Mackenzie, N., & Knipe, S. (2006). Research dilemmas: Paradigms, methods and methodology. *Issues in Educational Research*, 16(2), 193–205.
- Mitchell, J., Phillips, N., Trail, R., Walsh, S. C., Bickel, B., Bartley, W., & McConachy, M. (2020). A contemplative and artful métissage of inquiry and response. *Artizein: Arts and Teaching Journal*, 5(1), 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.2478/artz-2020-0002>
- National Planning Commission. (2013). National development plan 2030: Our future—make it work. The Presidency.
- Poćwierz-Marciniak, I., & Harciarek, M. (2021). The effect of musical stimulation and mother’s voice on the early development of musical abilities: A neuropsychological perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16), 8467. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168467>
- Ritblatt, S., Longstreth, S., Hokoda, A., Cannon, B. N., & Weston, J. (2013). Can music enhance school-readiness socioemotional skills? *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 27(3), 257–266. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2013.796330>
- Ruokonen, I., Tervaniemi, M., & Reunamo, J. (2021). The significance of music in early childhood education and care of toddlers in Finland: An extensive observational study. *Music Education Research*, 23(5), 634–646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2021.1954514>
- Rus, A., Dohotaru, A. I., Catalano, H., Ani-Rus, A., & Mestic, G. (2024). Development of social-emotional skills in early education through musical activities: Experimental study. *Educatia* 21, 28, 123–133. <https://doi.org/10.24193/ed21.2024.28.15>
- Russell-Bowie, D. (2009). Syntegration or disintegration? Models of integrating the arts across the primary curriculum. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 10(28), 1–23.
- Sala, G., & Gobet, F. (2020). Cognitive and academic benefits of music training with children: A multilevel meta-analysis. *Memory & Cognition*, 48(8), 1429–1441. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13421-020-01060-2>
- Váradí, J. (2022). A review of the literature on the relationship of music education to the development of socio-emotional learning. *SAGE Open*, 12(1), 21582440211068501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211068501>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Yunkun, L. (2024). The impact of music education on the quality of talent cultivation. *Transactions on Comparative Education*, 6(1), 72–77. <https://doi.org/10.23977/trance.2024.060112>