



Music in Early Childhood Education: Pre-Service Teachers Beliefs

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Abstract

Early childhood education helps build a foundation of learning that is built upon throughout the school years. Music education for young children requires a developmentally appropriate programme. Pre-schoolers develop memory and recall skills as they sing, recite songs and dance. The purpose of the study was to find out early childhood pre-service teachers perspectives about music education. The participants of the study were 25 pre-service students enrolled for the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. The study followed a qualitative approach and data was gathered through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The findings of the study suggest that ECE pre-service teacher's belief that music education is important and are aware of the benefits of music education at early childhood level. However, the study revealed that ECE pre-service teachers' basic knowledge about music was limited. The researcher recommends the inclusion of music as a core subject in early childhood programmes.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Music Education, Beliefs, Botswana.

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INTRODUCTION

Provision of early childhood programmes to all children is essential as a foundation for primary education. This period is the most critical period in a child's musical development. Music Education plays a very important role at early childhood years. It is paramount that early childhood service providers offer good music education program so that children can enjoy quality programmes right from an early age. Its benefits to a child among others include helping to boost cognitive and motor development as well as enhancing social skills. Music has the ability to enhance experience or strengthen the meaning of other activities (Bloomfield, 2000). According to Saracho (2012), a way to ensure that educational activities

are developmentally appropriate and content rich is by developing a curriculum that builds on children's play.

In order to offer an effective music education programmes, teacher training institutions should offer good programmes that will empower prospective teachers to confidently teach music education at any level. Music classes need to be properly planned for, and there should be direction, not haphazard kind of learning. A well-organised musical environment provides for a wide range of musical activities and experiences adequate to meet the needs and the interests of children (Edwards, Bayless & Ramsey, 2005). The Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 made a recommendation that the Botswana curriculum should include practical subjects such as music and art education. Although these subjects were included in the latest curriculum of 2001, they are not given priority as the core basic academic subjects, and they are not even examined (Makwinja, 2017; Mannathoko, 2008; Phuthego, 2008).

Problem Statement

There are challenges in the teaching of music in the classroom. Some schools do not offer music education at all, while in some of these schools that claim to offer the subject, teachers do not prepare a proper lesson plans for music/CAPA. For these subjects, learners are asked to sing their favourite songs, watch music videos or listen to music CDs, and in many cases, there were no set objectives to achieve.

Purpose of the Study

Tertiary institutions prepare early childhood educators who upon completion of their studies join the world of work to implement the early childhood curriculum. The purpose of the study was to find out ECCE pre-service teachers perspectives about the importance and benefits of music education. This study was inspired by study carried out in USA (Kim & Kemple, 2011), in which they wanted to find out perceptions of pre-service teachers with regards to music being a developmental tool or just a supplement.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- What are the pre-service early childhood teachers' beliefs about the importance and benefits of music education?
- What basic knowledge about music do early childhood pre-service students possess?
- What are the pre-service early childhood teachers' perceptions on Early Childhood Teacher Education & Music?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies focusing on music in early childhood have been carried out all over the world, including the USA, Finland, Sweden, Turkey and Brazil which focused on preservice teachers' perceptions (Kim & Kemple, 2011; Ruismaki & Tereseke, 2006; Aldemir & Kurt, 2014; Ilari, 2008). Aldemir & Kurt (2014) conducted a study in Turkey, whose purpose was to find out the transformation pre-school teachers candidates go through in their perceptions about teaching during their education program. They were enrolled in a teacher education program, and the study reveals a change in perception with regard to pre-school education. According to another study conducted in Sweden (Ehrlin & Tivenius, 2018) to look into factors that determine how music is conducted in preschools, concluded that the fundamental

view of music education determines the extent music teaching occurs and how it is carried out. While in South Korea, a study conducted to investigate the current music practices and teachers' needs for teaching music, the difficulty of the lack of ideas for music activities in preschools was identified as being the major challenge. Therefore teachers requested more applicable thorough in-service and preservice music education programmes for preschool teachers (Lee, 2009).

In Africa more studies have been done in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. In a study conducted in Kenya, Andang'o (2009) argues that children's musical experiences at early childhood heavily depend on the kind of musical exposures teachers have had and the availability of resource. According to this study, teachers see themselves as initiators of the musical activities while children simply participate in the activities. This findings, demonstrate how important teacher training is and how it affects teaching in the classroom.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Vygotsky believed children learn best through play, and play is always accompanied by music (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). This study is centred on Vygotsky's theory of proximal development and scaffolding. Vygotsky's concept of proximal development is based on the idea that development is defined by what a child can do on the social and individual level. Zurek, Torquarti and Acar (2014) defines scaffolding as, "a teaching strategy that involves providing support for children's learning that is well timed and well matched to the situation and child, and helps the child to be more successful than he would be without support." They argue that scaffolding is vital because it enables the teacher to determine the concepts that he wants the students to master in class, the curriculum objectives, to determine the concepts that students are likely to have mastered and to determine the point of departure or their level. Vygotsky's theory is important because it helps the teacher plan out developmentally appropriate activities that children are supposed to master, and are capable of doing on their own, or with the help of others

According to Eggen and Kauchack (2016), Vygotsky made educators realize that culture has a powerful influence on cognitive development and this provided the theoretical foundation for many of today's educators. Language rich interaction with the more knowledgeable other in a social environment promotes cognitive development. The same sentiments are shared by Ornstein & Hunkins (2014), who argue that, if we consider language to be the attachment of meaning to symbol, we conclude that language is human cultures' main tool, and also music, via written and auditory symbols, music carries meaning, and it too is a language (2014, p. 109). Cogo-Moreira et al. (2013) expound on this, "in particular, musical learning can assist in the processing of lexical skills and in improving pitch discrimination abilities in both speech and reading among non-musician and children. Well-designed learning experiences, coupled with appropriate scaffolding from peers and teacher, enable children to excel in music at levels we have not seen before and help young teacher to excel as music teachers (Wiggins, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach to the study. A case study was employed for the study. According to Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson and Walker (2014, p. 32), a case study is a type of ethnographic research that focuses on a single unit such as one individual, one group, one organization or one group. In order to gather data, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were employed.

Participants

Participants of the study were pre-service students in second and third year and who have enrolled for a Bachelor of Early Childhood program. This is a four-year program and music education courses are offered as core, optional and electives, that students could choose from. None of the students have taken a music related course during the time of data collection. The age range for the participants ranged between 18-30 years. Those chosen for the interview, were three early childhood pre-service teachers, from this cohort. They were chosen based on their performance on the questionnaire.

Instruments-Questionnaire

For the questionnaire, both open-ended and close ended questions were used. Content analysis was used to analyse both the questionnaire and interview data . To assess the student teacher beliefs and perceptions, a similar instrument, which was used for a similar study to investigate early childhood pre-service teachers beliefs about music (Kim & Kemple 2011), was employed. However, the questionnaire was adapted to suit the Botswana context. Furthermore, the numbers of questionnaire items were also reduced, but it still retained the main sections on beliefs about music and the basic knowledge on music.

Interview

To further examine teacher's beliefs, follow-up interviews were conducted with three early childhood teachers. The criterion for choosing those interviewed was based on their performance in the questionnaire. These three included the one who was able to identify all the music concepts, the average performer and the lower performer. Interview questions were prepared prior to the interview. All of the interviewees had just completed their teaching practice.

Document Analysis

An analysis of the Bachelor of Early Childhood Programme was carried out.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in three sections: beliefs about music, basic music knowledge and perceptions on early childhood teacher education and music.

Beliefs about the importance and benefits of Music

According to the respondents' questionnaire, all the participants believe that music plays a vital role in child development, and believe music education courses are relevant to their degree program. Almost all the participants believe music should be part of the of the Early Childhood curriculum, and only a few believe there is no need to offer it as a subject, it is an extra-curricular activity. The recurring theme on the relevance of music at early childhood were:

- Music is important in gross motor skills and fine motor skills;
- Music is a fun way of learning, children learn better and are able to express themselves through music and play;
- Children learn some most important aspects through music;

- Children learn through play, play is accompanied by some form of music or rhythmic expression;
- Arouse interest; children are able to express themselves through music

Pre-service students' basic music knowledge

Participants were asked to identify six (6) basic music elements, and these included; Pitch, Tempo, Rhythm, Beat, Dynamics and Melody. Of all these elements, beat and rhythm were the most popular concepts, as most of the respondents were able to identify them. Tempo and dynamics were the least popular elements, with only a smaller percentage of the respondents being able to identify them.

For the second part of the questionnaire, there was a table which required the students to match the aforementioned music elements with their definitions. Only 20% were able to accurately match all the elements and their definitions correctly. The remaining percentage of the respondents was not able to do so.

The first interviewee has taken music as a subject from kindergarten and had had some sort of instruction through the use of music from kindergarten, and also plays a wind instrument. The second interviewee had only experienced music through singing, she had sung in a choir at primary school and in church, she enjoyed singing, and was only familiar with tonic sofa notation. The third respondent's experience with music was singing in cultural ceremonies at home and listening to music on the radio.

Perceptions on Early Childhood Teacher Education & Music

The interview question focused on perceptions on early childhood teacher education and music. This included personal experiences with music including field experiences with music, and their confidence in implementing the curriculum.

With regard to their field experience with music, the first two interviewed respondents stated that they had noticed during their practice, that music was not offered as a lesson, but was mostly used to break up the day or transition from one topic to the next. The last interviewed respondent shared the same sentiments, stating that at her practice teaching school, there was no actual teaching of music in the classroom, but music was used only as part of play outside the classroom in the form of recitations and cultural games.

On the question of basic understanding of music as a subject in pre-schools, according to them; the first respondent stated that according to her there is a lack of understanding on the subject, adding that more often than not the learning process seems to be overlooked. The second respondent stated that, she also feels teachers find teaching music as a waste of time. The last respondent observed the need to educate teachers in music for better implementation. Participants outlined the following as measures that could be put in place help the acquire music skills:

- They should be taught the basic concepts
- Music courses should be included as core in their program
- Pre-service teachers should be required to take a music course

With regards to whether these pre-service teachers will be confident in implementing music at pre-schools, only one of them responded that she will definitely be comfortable in teaching music. The other two lamented that they would not be comfortable in implementing the subject.

Analysis on the Bachelor of Early Childhood Programme

Music courses have been included in The Bachelor of Early Childhood Programme for this cohort. Only One course, Music, Drama and movement is offered as a core subject, at fourth year level. The other courses, Introduction to Philosophy of Music Education and Listening, Composing and Performing are offered as optional courses at second year and third year respectively. Out of the 25 students who were participants in the study, second and third years, none of them have taken any Music course.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussion would be divided into three themes as per research questions

What are the pre-service early childhood pre-service teachers' beliefs about the importance and benefits of music education?

Pre-service early childhood student teacher's believe that music education is important and are aware of the benefits of music education at early childhood level. They acknowledge that children learn through play and that music allows children to learn freely which is in line with Vygotsky's theory. The findings of the study suggest that pre-service early childhood teacher's perceive music education as an important subject at early childhood and are aware of the benefits of music education at early childhood level. They acknowledge that children learn through play and that music allows children to learn freely which is in line with Vygotsky's theory. Despite the fact that all this students acknowledge music as being at early childhood level, it's ironical that none of these students have not taken a music course, which they think they need.

What basic knowledge about music do early childhood pre-service students possess?

The findings suggest that pre-service early childhood teachers have a very limited basic knowledge about music. Furthermore the participants believe that they will not be confident to teach music education. There was a correlation between the teachers' beliefs and their basic knowledge. Participants who have the basic in music knowledge were able to articulate quite clearly the importance and benefits of music. Those participants without the basic music knowledge/ limited knowledge were not able to articulate those benefits very well. Music play a big role function/role regarding child development, and if the teachers are not equipped with the necessary basic knowledge and skills to be able to implement the subject, this might have an effect on the teaching and learning. According to Andango (2013), children's musical experiences at early childhood heavily depend on the kind of musical exposures teachers have, which therefore suggests that, if the teachers' do not have the basics, learning is challenged.

What are the pre-service early childhood teachers perceptions on Early Childhood Teacher Education & Music?

Teacher preparation programs should provide teachers with experiences, both in the field and the classroom (Jacobs, 2001). Teacher Education programme have the responsibility of ensuring that students are equipped with necessary skills to implement the curriculum. Pre-service music teacher's education programmes aim to equip prospective music teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach music in the classroom (Ballantyne & Packer 2005). In South Africa, the Revised National Curriculum expect general class teachers in the

foundation phases to teach all the four expressive art; visual art , drama and music, but a study by Herbst and colleagues reveals that the teacher training that is provided is inadequate and cannot support the expectations of the curriculum in use (Herbst 2005). According to Scott- Kassner (1999: 25), the more we understand the impact of music on crucial aspect of young children’s development, the more clearly, we will see our professional need to stretch to reach all children.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, pre-service teachers’ believe that music is important as a developmental tool at early childhood. They perceive music as being a valuable course on early childhood teacher education. This is indeed true; Music plays a very vital role to young children as it provides the social and the educational platform for learning. It is this edutainment aspect that makes music fun. The singing and the playing, and we find is singing and playing in every culture, and as per Vygotskys theory. Culture provides the context in which development occurs. (Eggen & Kauchak, 2016) According to Vygotsky’ s scaffolding, learning takes place when there is interaction between a knowledgeable person who can offer guidance , which basically means that teachers can only be able to offer support in music if they are knowledgeable in music. Chadwick (2012, p. 440) states, “teachers can and want to be agents in Music Education in Botswana. However, for this to happen, they need the opportunity and support to develop...”. This therefore calls for teacher training institutions to support student teachers by giving them the opportunity and support right from their training stages including choosing courses or packaging modules.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that the Bachelor of Early Childhood programmes should offer Music courses as core subjects, if this is not possible, Bachelor of Early Childhood students should be encouraged to register for music education courses.

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