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*Teachers' Expertise and the Use of Music to Develop  
Language Skills in Primary Schools in Nigeria*

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## Teachers' Expertise and the Use of Music to Develop Language Skills in Primary Schools in Nigeria

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### Article History

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study was to establish the extent to which teachers use music to develop children's language skills in primary schools in Nigeria.

**Methodology:** The paper used a desk study review methodology where relevant empirical literature was reviewed to identify main themes and to extract knowledge gaps.

**Findings:** The study concluded that that teachers' teaching experience influenced their use of music to teach language skills.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The school management should

recruit fully trained teachers in schools. In addition, school managers should develop pre-service and induction courses for their language teachers on musical skills. This is because majority of teachers who were using music could not adequately and relevantly teach language skills to learners.

**Keywords:** *Teachers, Musical Skills, Language Skills, Songs, Expertise, Teacher's Attitude.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The initiative to use music as a medium of instruction has created a need for teacher preparation, instrument acquisition, and the expansion of music curriculum in schools. Experts in the field of music education agree that the early development of musical aptitude begins before birth (Silton & Silton, 2015). Therefore, the ability for educators to use music as a teaching tool represented a novel and crucial method for enhancing students' linguistic development.

In advanced countries like Israel, educators have noticed a worrying trend: a decrease in students' reading proficiency. Because of this, kids were less likely to succeed in school and have a positive impact on society. Young children especially like to move to the beat of the music. Regrettably, educators' understanding of how music can help kids learn to speak better was lacking.

According to Flottmann (2021), the incorporation of music into the classroom helps students grasp the significance of individual sounds in the context of language and literacy. The ability to speak a second language is widely regarded as a key factor in students' academic success and their countries' overall growth and development. Flottmann (2021) adds that exposure to music facilitates the development of early literacy and language skills. When kids are exposed to skilled educators in the field of music, they develop an interest in learning to decode the sounds around them.

Music educators, according to Campbell and Kassner (2020), should have the training to incorporate musical instruction into language classes. Children have a natural affinity for music, and only qualified and encouraging educators can help their students make the mental connections necessary to master music and language. Competent teachers, according to Runfola *et al.* (2022), better understand the varying needs of their students' development, create locally relevant music resources, and use their musical expertise to foster students' language growth. To their already impressive repertoire of language teaching skills, teachers who are well-versed in using music to engage their students would bring below-average students' musical abilities and interest in learning to a new level (Hansen & Milligan, 2022). Therefore, it was crucial to investigate how best to use music in the classroom to improve students' linguistic abilities and what kind of training and experience teachers need to do so.

Children's tonal development was found to be positively influenced by musical training in a study involving 165 preschoolers of Hispanic, Caucasian, and African-American descent and 11 randomly and purposefully selected educators. The results of the study also showed that the children who had been exposed to musical experiences had greater grammatical comprehension, larger vocabularies, and better sound recognition. On the other hand, Campbell and Kassner (2020) discovered a parallel between musical notation and spoken language. The only way to truly understand either is to pay attention.

Children's educational needs as a whole have been called for in the Nigeria National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework (2016). (NECDPF, 2016). Policy document encourages taking a thematic approach to teaching various disciplines. The Nigeria Institute of Curriculum Studies also stresses the importance of encouraging musical development in preschoolers (Natale-Abramo, 2015).

According to NECDPF (2016), 30% of Nigerian primary school children do not have adequate literacy skills. This was a result of low socioeconomic status as well as ineffective pedagogical practices and a dearth of linguistic resources in the classroom. As a result, many students leave school without the linguistic skills they'll need to succeed in adulthood, underscoring the importance of tapping into teachers' knowledge of how to use music to foster language development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Kids who have a knack for music are set up for success in an environment that encourages them to test out new ideas. Infancy and early childhood are crucial periods for acquiring language, and music plays a significant role in both of these processes. Both music and language are reliant on attentive hearing, and children who are proficient in both benefits greatly. Children's oral and receptive language development is facilitated when teachers employ musical methods of instruction.

In addition, a certain level of expertise is required when using music to instruct a foreign language. Teachers with this knowledge can tap into their students' innate musical talent while also learning about the children's other developmental needs. Inadequately trained educators often fail to see the value in using music in the classroom to help students learn language. Children's language development may suffer as a result. Students with language impairment are more likely to drop out of school, have to repeat grades and subjects, and show little improvement in their academic performance or development of their innate musical abilities. The studies that were looked at all had one thing in common: they all stressed the importance of teaching young children music and making sure there were enough resources for teachers.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was establishing the extent to which teachers use music as a teaching strategy to develop pupils' language skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this research could be used by the Ministry of Education to support the case for including music in the classroom as a means of fostering linguistic growth among elementary school students. The Ministry can also make sure that all preschool educators are well-versed in music and capable of incorporating it into their lessons. The findings of this study could be used by the Nigeria Institute of Curriculum Development to guide a review of curriculum that would include music as a teaching strategy to advance language acquisition among students.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Use of Music to Develop Pupils' Language Skills in Primary Schools**

To learn through listening, one must first learn to listen, says Mbwesa (2016). Young children's listening skills lay the groundwork for their future language and literacy learning. In some classroom settings, listening is emphasized heavily. This necessitates that language instructors incorporate musical activities into their lessons. Children's phoneme awareness is likely to improve

as a result of this shift because they will have a greater motivation to actively listen to and learn the meaning of a variety of sounds.

Children around the world who were more exposed to musical concepts had an easier time picking up language. Similarly, an American study of 165 elementary school students and their teachers found that musical instruction improved the students' verbal and lexical skills. Teachers in Canadian preschools evaluated the effectiveness of a musical approach to teaching reading by giving the same test to children taught both with and without music. According to the results, the performance of the experimental group was 50% higher than that of the control group. As a result, research into teachers' knowledge was necessary for enhancing primary school teachers' use of music to foster language development in their students.

### **Teachers' Music Training and use of Music to Develop Pupils' Language Skills**

Teachers' musical training can help them decide whether or not to use music as a teaching tool for the purpose of improving students' linguistic abilities. The academic performance of secondary school students in London was found to be correlated with the use of songs in the classroom. Zicari (2016), however, discovered that primary school educators who were unwilling to use music in the classroom had not received training in the area of music as an instructional tool. As a result, research into the knowledge base needed by educators to effectively employ musical aptitude in the classroom was crucial.

Adequately trained music teachers foster children's confidence, self-esteem, and motivation, as noted by Moreno, Friesen & Bialystok (2021). This fosters a community of learners interested in discovering the connections between rhythms, sounds, and their meanings, which in turn improves linguistic competence. Researchers Boahene and Baffoe (2015) found that only teachers with music skills were able to promote learning in children about music in a study of Zanzibar preschools. Training in music improves reading ability, as shown by empirical evidence gathered over time. Strait and Kraus (2019); Kraus and Chandrasekaran (2020). (2021). Therefore, it was suggested that primary school teachers acquire sufficient musical training to employ music as a means of fostering children's language development. This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by exploring how music education can aid language teaching in Nigeria.

### **Empirical Review**

Bsharat *et al.* (2021) conducted a study on the influence of music and educational songs on EFL students' achievement from their teacher's perspective in Jenin region. This paper desires to explore the influence of music and educational songs on EFL students' achievement from their teachers' perspective in the Jenin region. The research was designed to probe the role of songs in teaching English to EFL students. Literary research on songs has helped to highlight the importance of educational songs in teaching EFL students. In this respect, the researchers adopted a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative). Likewise, data was collected through a questionnaire administered to English teachers and interviews of ten English teachers. The findings analysis shows that music and educational songs are barely used to develop learners' language skills. The research work suggested that EFL teachers should be trained on the effective use of educational songs and music in English classes. Moreover, schools and curriculum should be provided with educational songs teaching materials.

Bokiev and Ismail (2021) carried out a study on Malaysian ESL teachers' belief and practices regarding the use of music and songs in second language teaching. Regardless of numerous studies supporting the effectiveness of utilizing music and songs in second language teaching, there is a remarkably limited amount of research investigating how music and songs are actually used by language teachers and the beliefs underpinning their practices, particularly in the Malaysian educational context. This qualitative study explored Malaysian ESL teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the use of music and songs in language instruction at different levels of education as well as factors influencing their instructional practices. The research participants consisted of five primary-level, five secondary-level and five tertiary-level ESL teachers working at public and private educational institutions, who were selected using purposeful sampling strategy. Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework for qualitative data analysis. Findings of the study indicated the ESL teachers from all three levels of education held overall positive beliefs about the benefits and appropriateness of music and songs as a teaching tool and utilized them in various ways to promote students' language learning. A number of factors were found to influence the teachers' use of music and songs in their classrooms.

Atabek and Burak (2020) conducted a study on pre-school and primary school pre-service teachers' attitudes towards using technology in music education. The study aims to develop a valid and reliable scale that measures attitude towards using technology in music education and to investigate pre-school and primary school pre-service teachers' attitudes towards using technology in music education concerning their demographic variables and musical experiences. A total of 640 students studying in pre-school and primary education departments at a public university in Turkey participated in this research (N=640). Data were collected using a questionnaire for collecting the demographic information and the musical background of the respondents in addition to Attitude towards Using Technology in Music Education Scale, which was developed by the researchers in this study. Analyses resulted in an 8-item Attitude towards Using Technology in Music Education Scale with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.931. Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated a statistically significant model fit to the data with six indices indicating a good fit and three indicating a substantial fit. Attitude towards using technology in music education did not show any significant difference concerning gender and musical background. However, primary school pre-service teachers had a more positive attitude than those of pre-school pre-service teachers. Finally, age correlated with the attitude towards using technology in music education.

Holden and Button (2016), examined the teaching of music in the primary school by the non-music specialist. This article reports on an investigation of the teaching of music by non-music specialists in the primary school. In particular, it examines attitudes to teaching music, factors affecting teachers' confidence, the relationship between confidence and training, support for music teaching, teaching experience and musical background. The non-specialist teachers taking part in this survey were chosen from twelve schools across one Local Education Authority (LEA). The attitudes and views on teaching music of 71 teachers were obtained through a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews. The findings of this survey show that there is much work still to be done in providing non-specialists with effective long-term training and support to increase their music skills, subject knowledge, and confidence, to enable them to make a more marked difference to children's musical education.

Biasutti *et al.* (2015), conducted research on confidence development in non-music specialist trainee primary teachers after an intensive programme. This article describes an international educational experience addressed to 23 trainee primary teachers coming from Austria, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovenia. The Intensive Programme called 'International Summer School in Educating Music Teachers' (ISSEMT) was offered at Padova University, Italy with the purpose of fostering confidence and competences among trainee generalist teachers for teaching music in the primary school. In planning the didactic approach of the ISSEMT, methods designed to enhance participants' understandings of teaching creatively and teaching for creativity were adopted. The entire educational activity was evaluated by students using questionnaires and discussion. In addition, a follow-up interview was conducted with students after two years and five months, at the end of the ISSEMT. Students refer to the improvement of confidence in teaching music and the application of a creative approach. They appreciated the approach, the practical teaching ideas and the way the course closely related to their educational needs. These results are discussed in the framework of confidence development of the generalist teacher in the primary school for teaching music. The key factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the ISSEMT are also discussed.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in the executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## **FINDINGS**

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

A knowledge gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the issue discussed. For instance, (Bsharat *et al.*, 2021) who conducted a study on the influence of music and educational songs on EFL students' achievement from their teacher's perspective in Jenin region. The general objective of the study was to explore the influence of music and educational songs on EFL students' achievement from their teachers' perspective in the Jenin region. The researchers adopted a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative). Contrary to our current study which will establish the extent to which teachers use music to develop children's language skills in primary schools in Nigeria, using a desk study method of review. Their study also identified a geographical data whereby they focused in jenin region while our current study will focus in Nigeria.

Methodological gap is identified in a study conducted by (Biasutti *et al.*, 2015) who conducted a research on confidence development in non-music specialist trainee primary teachers after an intensive programme. Their entire educational activity was evaluated by students using questionnaires and discussion. In addition, a follow-up interview was conducted with students after two years and five months, at the end of the ISSEMT.

A study carried out by (Holden, and Button 2016), who examined the teaching of music in the primary school by the non-music specialist. Suggested a difference in concept, hence the study did not fill a gap on the extent to which teachers use music to develop children's language skills in schools.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings for each aim, the study established the following conclusions. The first thing that stood out was that most educators make use of music when teaching a foreign language. The use of music in instruction and the favorable responses from teachers led to this conclusion. Second, it was found that the training of educators had a direct impact on their ability to employ musical means to foster linguistic growth. The vast majority of educators who used music had the requisite training to effectively incorporate it into language instruction and tailor it to the needs of individual students. Teachers' outlook was also found to have both direct and indirect effects on students' achievement. Students' attitudes toward their teachers and the material being taught have a significant impact on their motivation to learn and sense of competence. The majority of educators had a negative outlook despite frequently using music in the classroom. This suggested that students were not adequately motivated to acquire linguistic competence due to teachers' lackadaisical demeanor in the classroom.

### **Recommendations**

In order to ensure student success, school administrations should hire only certified educators. Administrators of educational institutions should also provide their language teachers with pre-service and induction training in musical skills. This is because the vast majority of educators who attempted to use music to teach language skills failed miserably.

To capitalize on the opportunities presented by 21st-century education and pique their students' interest in learning, primary school instructors should push for mandatory induction and training in instrumental teaching and incorporate musical instruction into their lessons to teach linguistics.



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