

# **Diamond in the Dirt: Repositioning the Teaching and Learning of Music Theory in Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

Effective study of the theory of music in secondary schools provides the basis for a successful progressive musical education. The teaching and learning of the theory of music in Zimbabwe is ineffective, yet it is the backbone of music studies. This study therefore sought to critically explore challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the theory of music and explicate how these challenges hinder the successful acquisition of music education. A descriptive approach was implemented to carry out the study and data was gathered through face-to-face interviews and participant observation. Purposive sampling methods were used to select four schools that offer music as a subject in Masvingo district. Thick descriptions were applied in analysing data. The study reveals several challenges that affect the teaching and learning of the theory of music. These challenges include a negative attitude towards the subject, lack of funding, lack of specialised music rooms, equipment, and accessories, inadequate training of music teachers, and lack of prioritisation by school administrators. Therefore, the study recommends that trained and appropriate skilled personnel, expertise, and physical resources be made available in all secondary school institutions teaching musical education.

**Key words:** theory of music, challenges, teaching and learning, secondary schools, Zimbabwe

## **Introduction and Background**

Music performs a crucial function in the psychological, social, political, religious, and cultural aspects of a learner, especially in the music education process which is the focus of this study (Barton, 2018; Gutierrez, 2019). However, the effective teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools are proving to be a problematic task globally due to various economic, physical, social, political, and pedagogical issues (Ganyata, 2015, Mupa&Chinooneka 2015; Welch et al, 2011; Serdyukov, 2017). Therefore, I argue that for an effective and successful music education to take place in secondary schools the study of the theory of music needs to be well-grounded and well-executed.

Globally, the teaching and learning of music theory is facing several challenges Machingura (2019); Ganyata (2015). According to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (2019), the value of music education is still unsatisfactory in both the primary and secondary learning environment regardless of the intensive interventions by government policies. Music educators around the world are facing many challenges to ensure that all children have access to good quality developmental music education during their Secondary school years. Thus, the study sought to examine challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools which forms the basis of all music studies, and explicate how these challenges hinder the successful acquisition of music education. The study also proposed strategies for effective music education to materialise.

In emphasising the importance of learning music, Okongo (2009) observed that music plays an essential role in child development processes. Thus, the awakening and nurturing of the aesthetic spirit as part of the development of an aesthetic theory of music education is a challenge for every teacher but brings great rewards, both tangible and non-tangible (Ulvik, 2020). The theory of music skills developed in music lessons is important to children and imparts problem-solving skills to children as they produce their musical compositions. These acquired skills are crucial in creating a well-rounded child in the twenty-first century (Okongo, 2009).

Therefore, the theoretical framework that shapes this study is the widely implemented Kodaly methodology for music teaching and learning. The Kodaly method was developed in Hungary in the 1940s and 1950s by the composer and music educator Zoltán Kodaly (1882-1967) as an all-

inclusive system for music education. This theory has been selected for its emphasis on understanding that the theory of music learning is for everyone and that singing should be used as a vehicle to develop music knowledge. The theory explains the best ways learners, especially young ones, can be assisted to gain knowledge and skills in the study of theory of music. Kodaly argues that singing is a fundamental aspect of developing music knowledge (Kodaly in Eosze, 1982). As such singing should be a facilitator to develop various musical skills. Learners should be exposed to singing as much as possible to develop various related music expertise. Kodaly emphasises that, “a deeper musical education can at all times develop only where singing forms its basis. Only the human voice, can be the fertile soil of a musical culture extending to all” (Kodaly in Eosze, 1982).

Kodaly also emphasises the use of a child-developmental approach to music learning. According to Choksy the Kodaly method uses a child-developmental approach to sequence, the introduction of skills, after taking consideration of the capabilities of the child (Choksy, 1999). Kodaly’s pedagogy was summarised by Mason as “sounds before symbols; principles before rules; and practice before theory” (2001, p.7). Another main contribution by Kodaly relates to the practice of folk music from the child’s own culture as a means to develop music knowledge. The Folk Music of Hungary (1971), notes that folk songs play a strategic role in supporting learners to attain music skills. Participation and response to music in the mother tongue enable the use of songs and games in the classroom environment. For example, authentic music which is opulent in cultural traditions will make the attainment of the theory of music skills stress-free.

A brief survey of the education sector in Zimbabwe unearthed that the sector has a long way to go in achieving the much-needed academic progress. Mupa&Chinooneka (2015) investigated the existence of poor education standards in Zimbabwe and found that teachers do not engage in various teaching methods. In addition, the teachers do not prepare an assortment of media for usage in the teaching and learning process thereby limiting instructional materials to textbooks and syllabuses. On the other hand, Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2014) researched the perceptions of teachers on the causes of low performances in ordinary-level examinations. The study attributed poor performance to factors such as lack of adequate infrastructure, poor remuneration, and lack of appropriate support from the learners’ parents. Machingura&Zinhuku (2019) explored

challenges that contribute to the non-teaching of music in three selected primary schools in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe to ascertain why, despite being a compulsory subject for primary schools, music is not taught in the three selected schools. The findings of the research revealed that the challenges were related to curriculum-related issues, non-specialised teachers educating music learners, absence of music textbooks, and lack of physical resources such as space for teaching of music, among many other factors.

The above-mentioned studies focused on the various education issues affecting Zimbabwean secondary schools. A lacuna still exists as information is lacking on particular challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the theory of music specifically, as a subject area under the study of music. Mastering the theory of music is fundamental for the effective teaching and learning of music as a subject, as this provides a firm base for all other music aspects to be taught and learned. Hence, without a proper foundation in the theory of Music, half-baked students are likely to emerge thereby greatly affecting the teaching and learning of music in the future. Therefore, this study will also suggest possible remedies for the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the theory of music.

## **Methodology**

### ***Methods***

The qualitative approach was employed to critically analyse challenges affecting the teaching and learning of music theory in selected secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. The approach was appropriate for exploring meanings and insights of music experts regarding the teaching and learning of theory of music in high schools (Mohajan, 2018). The qualitative research occurs in a natural setting thus enabling the researcher to get involved in the actual experiences (Creswell, 2009).

### ***Design***

A research design refers to how a researcher plans to answer a set of questions (McCombes, 2019). It comprises the methods, techniques to collect, analyse, and interpret data (Bouchrika, 2020). In this context, we also describe a research design as a structure that clearly guides how the researcher intends to achieve set aim(s) and objectives of the study. This study adopted a descriptive design. According to MacCombes (2019) a descriptive research accurately and systematically delineates

a population, state of affairs or occurrence. Rillo and Alieto (2018) also defined descriptive research as a purposive process of assembling, analysing, categorising, and arranging data about the phenomenon under study, and then adequately interpreting the data with or without the aid of statistical methods.

### ***Sampling***

The strategy involved identifying major sources of information involved in the administration, learning and teaching of theory of music. The purposive sampling technique which was adopted in this study targets specific informants who are reliable sources of information. The sample includes music experts and renowned music administrators and advocates of music education in Zimbabwe. Four schools which provide music education in Masvingo were purposively selected as key informants to address the main research question, which sought to identify and examine the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of theory of music in secondary schools. The sample also consisted of selected teachers, music experts, education experts and students in order to get information from all perspectives.

### ***Data collection***

Interviews were first conducted with experts in Masvingo district to discuss the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of theory of music in secondary schools. Interviews were also conducted with music practitioners to get an insider's view. Through face-to-face interviews, music experts, teachers and music students provided elucidations on the teaching and learning of theory of music. All responses were tape recorded for further transcription. The study also engaged participant observation method as a technique for data collection. Through adopting an emic approach, the researcher was involved in first hand teaching and learning of theory of music in secondary schools. Furthermore, data was collected through documentary analysis, where past information on the status of teaching and learning of music theory in secondary schools was collected for future analysis. A video recorder and camera were utilized to record interviews with all selected participants as well as taking photographs of music lessons for future analysis.

### ***Data analysis***

The study utilised thick descriptions in order to analyse the assembled data. Stone (2008, p. 225) describes qualitative research of this nature as a detailed ethnographic description. Themes were used to code, analyse and present results through thick descriptions.

## Results and Discussion

### *Repositioning the teaching and learning of music theory in secondary schools*

The main purpose of this section is to present and analyse the various factors affecting the effective teaching of theory of music assembled from research findings. The results are grouped under educational, technological, physical and social factors (Figure 1).

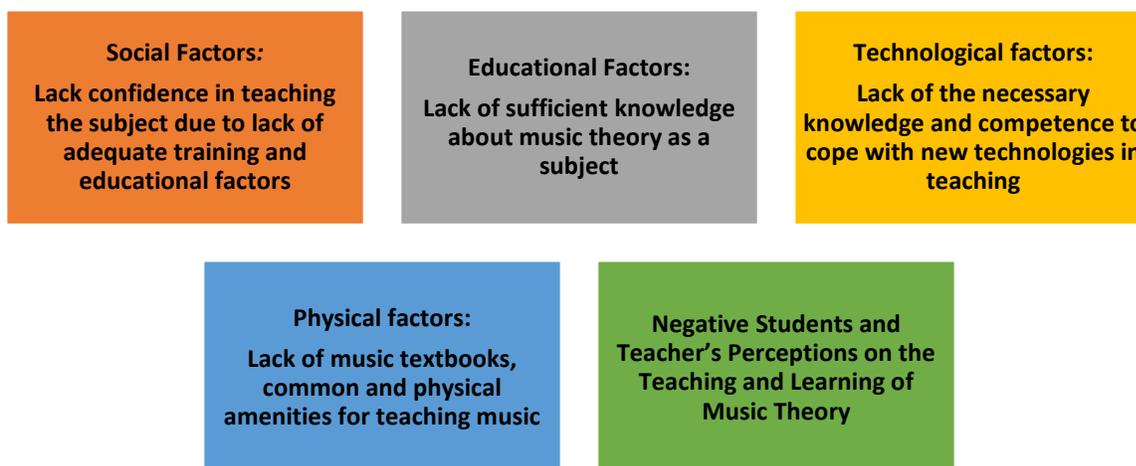


Figure 1.1 diagram showing challenges affecting the teaching and learning of music theory in secondary schools.

The diagram commences by elaborating educational factors that hinder the effective teaching and learning of music in secondary schools. Educational factors are mainly concerned with the qualifications of music teachers. The main question to ask is if music teachers have the necessary

skills and qualifications to teach music theory in secondary schools. The study reveals that though most of the music teachers have the relevant qualifications, however, music teachers have a challenge in delivering music theory lessons due to insufficient knowledge they receive at their respective music learning institutions.

Technological challenges affecting the teaching and learning of music comprise a lack of technical music gadgets as well as a lack of expertise to operate the gadgets used to learn the theory of music. The most notable challenge in the teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools is the lack of physical amenities to enable the smooth operation of music lessons. Music theory learning requires music stationery, music laboratories, music instruments, and classes that are dedicated to the subject. The final challenge affecting the teaching and learning of music theory falls under the social category. Most of the teachers lack confidence in teaching the subject and face an immense lack of support from administrators. Leaders in secondary schools have a low appreciation for music as a subject and lack the knowledge of how to successfully administer the teaching and learning of this delicate and complex subject.

### ***Educational factors***

The lack of sufficient knowledge about music theory as a subject is one of the challenges affecting the teaching of music theory in the secondary schools under study. In the same vein, one teacher (participant 5) revealed in an interview that,

*“We do not have sufficient experience and in-depth knowledge concerning the theory of music, as the subject is not introduced from the elementary level. Therefore, the education we received is not comprehensive as it was conducted in a rushed manner and it lacked the concept of marrying theory into practice which is very crucial in gaining adequate musical knowledge”. (Participant, 5).*

In support, respondent 6 had this to say:

*“Teachers lack explanations in what they teach as a result we do not clearly understand the taught concepts”.*

Similarly, previous researches conducted by various scholars concur that the majority of teachers may lack adequate teacher training hence they lack sufficient in-depth knowledge and expertise in explaining technical challenges encountered in teaching and learning music (Welch and Henley, 2014, Fry et al 2003, Roulston, 1997 and Russell-Bowie, 2009). In confirmation of the results found in this study, Sianagowa (2013 p. 4) emphasises the existence of insufficient teacher training. He asserts that “All over the world just like any other curriculum area there is a dire need for teachers who have been specifically trained to meet the unique challenges of teaching this very delicate subject”.

Participant 4 also further articulated that “*as children, we do not have enough time to practice theory and most of the time the students will be specialising on musical instruments*”

In addition, respondent E said ‘*there is not enough time for students to learn how to understand the theory of music. Teachers lack one-on-one time for those who are too shy to participate in class*’.

In Nambia Roulston (1997) and Russell-Bowie (2009) revealed that the major challenge affecting the teaching and learning of theory of music was allocation of insufficient time in the teaching day. Theory of music was allocated short periods as a result most learners suffered due to lack of enough time to grasp the concepts.

### ***Technological Factors***

The greatest problem of teachers towards ICT has been that of acquiring the necessary knowledge and competence to cope with new technologies in teaching. Many teachers lack training in the usage of new media and the means of processing information in music performance (Barroso, 1997). Casper (2003) suggests that teacher preparation and professional development programs should actively promote the development of technological skills for teachers. Rogers (1995) mentions that teacher’s attitudes toward technology and expertise is often identified as key factors associated with their use of technology. Teachers must have positive attitudes toward technology (Zhao & Cziko, 2001).

Waddell and Williamson (2019) posit that the growth of technology within society is redefining the twenty-first century thereby revolutionizing how people work and learn. Technology has become a necessity, in musical formation, production, expression, dissemination, promotion, and consumption of music (Hugill, 2012). Music education is no exception considering significant studies and growth in the discipline as well as the general trends of technology use in the modern classroom (Purves, 2012; Sweeney et al., 2017). However, Waddell & Williamson (2019) laments that the attention given to understanding how and where technology is being incorporated in music classroom settings has not been applied in teaching environments.

### ***Physical Factors***

From observations in this research, the lack of music textbooks is a common challenge found in most secondary schools. As articulated by one teacher, (participant 4), said ‘there is a lack of textbooks’. As illuminated by Mwila (2015) shortage of textbooks was also rampant in Zambian schools. Some South African and Namibian schools have extreme limitations on the amount of resources for teaching any of the subjects in the curriculum. Some schools are without electricity, running water, books, toilets, chairs, desks or windows (Van Niekirk, 1997). This was an important observation of the problems that impeded the teaching of music lessons.

### ***Social Factors***

Challenges in the teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools may also emanate from teachers’ lack of confidence in teaching the subject. One of the secondary school teachers (participant 3) elucidated that “*Sometimes I lack confidence in teaching the subject due to lack of the adequate training, experience, and techniques I received.*”

As articulated by one teacher, (participant 7),

*“Theory of music is a very technical area which requires the teacher to be well versed with skills and knowledge required for successful teaching and learning to occur.”*

Moreover, lack of support is one of the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools. In terms of lack of support, Van Jansen Vauren (2012) claimed that music teachers lacked several support systems such as the school administration, fellow music teachers, and even parents for a successful delivery of musical skills. The situation of very little support existed and it was only in 2012 that a slight improvement could be realised in the teaching of arts in the Vryheid District in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

### ***Students and Teacher's Perceptions of the Teaching and Learning of Music Theory***

There are several perceptions teachers have concerning the teaching of the theory of music. Participant 4 had this to say “*As a teacher sometimes I think music is a complicated and difficult subject to teach*”. Generally, most of the teachers believe they are not competent in teaching and learning music. Some music teachers think they are not yet confident enough to teach the theory of music due to deficient training received in various academic institutions. These findings entail that strong feelings of efficiency endow teachers with the confidence to teach music and to take advantage of more innovative teaching strategies, which results in low teacher anxiety levels (Reid, 2001).

Samkange (2016) observed that teachers as well as students perceive music as a very crucial subject that is interdisciplinary. Music opens up pupils' minds in many ways as they learn to think creatively. This creativity is promoted through the composition of songs. In that regard, music promotes imagination as pupils can solve problems quickly. Music also teaches pupils to be empathetic and, at the same time enhances teamwork and discipline. Music is also fun by its nature. Playing an instrument is fun and it brings self-confidence and satisfaction. In that regard, music contributes to the development of self-esteem and self-actualisation. Music therefore contributes to the development of the individual. It touches on the different tenets of development which are social development, emotional development, cognitive development, moral development, and intellectual development among others.

### ***Addressing challenges faced in the Teaching and Learning of Music theory in Secondary Schools***

The teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools is affected by several challenges. However, several tactics can be implemented to combat the challenges in secondary schools.

Participant 5 suggested that:

*“Kuti tiwane ruzivo rwakakwana kudzidzisa theory of music zvizere, tinofanira kugara tichiita maworkshops apo tinowana ruzivo kubva kunyanzvi dzinodzidzisa theory of music. Izvi zvichabatsira kuti tivene hunyanzvi hwekudzidzisa vana vedu muchikoro”.*

Participant 5’s words imply:

*“For us to adequately acquire knowledge to teach theory of music, we must conduct always conduct workshops regularly where we will get knowledge from skilled theory of music. This will help us to gain relevant skills for teaching our children in school.*

Workshops intended for music teachers are essential programs that maybe utilised as a strategy to combat challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools. Steiner (2017) defines a workshop as a common educational format for transmitting information and promoting skill acquisition. Workshops create a thorough educational experience in a short amount of time, are an appropriate way to impart hands-on skills and provide a way for individuals to pass on ideas and methods to colleagues (Orngreen and Levinsen, 2017). Therefore, the study recommends that workshops may be organised to train secondary music teachers. In similar studies carried out workshops were found useful in enhancing skills. Mainwaring, Krasnow, and Donna (2010) recommended that workshops enhance the mastery of skills and promote self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positive self-image.

Participant 6, a music professional had this to say in English:

*“If it was possible we could use the traineeship model in which cultural dance students are taught indigenous dance in similarity to how industrial students are trained”.*

The music expert continued to say that

*“...In the industry, trainees undergo rigorous preparation and are denied the opportunity to venture into the field until they have fully grasped the concepts of their trade. Similarly, theory of music teachers will undergo intense training and will not be allowed to teach until they have grasped all important aspects of the theory of music.”*

The above participant advocated for the use of traineeship as a strategy for combating challenges faced in the teaching and learning of the theory of music in secondary schools. The traineeship program is described by the International Labour Organization (2017) as a means for young people to acquire highly valued context-based experience. Therefore, the strategy might also be applied in the theory of music training as music teachers will be taught in the original setting of the music, which enhances understanding and knowledge about the theory of music. In addition, the features of a traineeship program include careful recruitment and selection of trainees, opportunities for practicing skills, and availability of guidance materials (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2009). In this way, our study concurs with recommending traineeship for skill acquisition and performance agrees. However, the use of traineeship for the theory of music teaching and learning in Zimbabwe is lacking.

The use of media in teaching any subject is crucial to achieving set educational goals. Shumbayaonda (2000) refers to non-projected media as two-dimensional aids which either convey their implications pictorially or with words. Examples of these are text books, flip charts, posters, maps, and pictures. Dekeer (1994) concurs that the absence of quality of resources used in educational processes has a direct impact on the level of quality of pupil achievement. Lack of teaching-learning equipment affects both the speed and quality of work produced. Teaching and learning become more effective as media enhance concept development. Wario (1989) says that instructional media makes the learning process more effective in the classroom by stimulating pupils' interest. Kemp and Dayton stress the point that “media is not supplementary to, or in support of instruction but are the instructional input itself”.

## **Mapping the Way Forward: Recommendations**

The study will suggest possible solutions based on ideas propounded by various scholars such as Mupa&Chinooneka 2015; Machingura&Zinhuku; and Gutierrez, 2019. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has a critical mandate to perform effective and successful music theory education in Zimbabwe. The study endorses suggestions by Mupa& Chinooneka (2015) who recommended that headmasters and the ministry should supervise school practices. The supervision will enable children to align with the demands of twenty-first-century education. Additionally, supervision of music teachers is also critical to ascertain and encourage teachers to practice proper teaching, scheming, and planning. Private and public funding should be encouraged to provide necessary resources like textbooks and adequate physical amenities that are in dire shortage (Mupa&Chinooneka, 2015).

Gutierrez (2019) raises two critical issues that need to be considered for effective learning of music theory. Gutierrez encourages music theory teaching by clarifying the obstacles underlying conventional theory curricula. Secondly, he pushes for the introduction of an affordance-rich curricular tool that promotes embodied and enactive sense-making in a music theory classroom environment. According to Gutierrez music theory students may be encouraged to play three roles which are individual performer, ensemble member, and conductor. This process will enable listening skills, structural knowledge, analytical proficiency, and performance technique which are all enacted in the three roles students play to be ingrained in the students (Gutierrez, 2019).

Machingura & Zinhuku (2019) bring an important dimension to the array of solutions that can be realised in the teaching and learning of music theory. The authors advocate for the employment of an educative program for staff to counteract the lack of music knowledge. Thus, training of teachers in the Visual and Performing Arts may be prioritised and more support and resources such as textbooks, music rooms and auditoriums for the teaching of music in schools should be availed.

## **Conclusion**

The study concludes that there are a number of challenges affecting the teaching and learning of music theory in secondary schools. Some of the challenges included lack of physical music facilities, lack of funding, lack of music specialist teachers, lack of support for music teachers.

Therefore, this study assisted in solving some of the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of music. It reconnoitred beyond current horizons ways and means to provide quality music education to secondary school learners in Zimbabwe. The study suggested emphasising the importance of music to understand the value this subject offers to students. Music has the potential to produce a range of positive outcomes, such as teaching students' confidence, creativity, self-reliance, and resilience. In addition, among other suggestion the study recommended that emphasizing music's inclusive nature and using the media in showcasing performances and cultural opportunities may assist music educators' efforts to invite interest and regain the funding they need.

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