

Effectiveness of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing for learners

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Background: It is well-known, but perhaps not well documented, that after the first democratic elections in 1994, South African education was declared standard. However, poverty is widespread in rural-based schools, which negatively impacts the development of quality education for learners. This is attributed to the unique challenges that learners in rural-based schools face that affect their quality of education. Apart from inadequate state funding, insufficient resources, and underqualified teachers, learners are faced with poor reading and writing in foreign languages such as English. Furthermore, teaching language incorporating music as a supportive tool has been neglected. Music can be a powerful tool for language teaching for several reasons. This has become a significant contributor and barrier to effective education.

Objective: Therefore, from this background, this article aims to discuss the effectiveness of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing in rural-based schools.

Method: A qualitative research method was used embedded within content analysis of existing scholarly writings.

Results: Framed within music learning theory, the findings of this article reveal that music education plays an essential role in improving the readability of learners, especially in rural-based schools.

Conclusion: This article concludes by affirming that music education is essential in developing and fostering the reading and writing of languages such as English in rural-based schools. However, this calls for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to provide a proper music infrastructure in rural-based schools.

Contribution: This article provides new insight about the role of music education in improving reading and writing for learners.

Keywords: infrastructure; music education; reading; rural-based schools; writing.

Introduction

Africa is traditionally considered a less-developed continent. Most of the region's countries continue to face significant developmental issues, even though several have advanced over the past 20 years. There is a growing understanding that without sufficient funding for education, Africa is unlikely to progress, especially in rural-based schools (De Villiers 2015; Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Mugovhani 2011; Yende & Yende 2022a). According to Olugbenga and Olaniyan (2011), in Africa, for the past 25 years, there has been an increase in concern about the calibre of teachers and learning across the continent of Africa and particularly in rural-based schools. The main issues impacting the level of quality education in many rural-based schools in Africa are the lack of competent educators and the inadequate infrastructure (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; De Villiers 2015; Du Plessis & Mestry 2019). These are the significant factors contributing to the visible challenges that affect the quality of education in rural-based schools.

On the African continent, South Africa is believed to be one of the fastest-developing countries, and this is attributed to its growing economy as compared to other African countries on the continent. It is commonly known that although many changes have been introduced to guarantee that learners receive a high-quality education, traditionally underprivileged rural schools have found it more difficult to keep up with such improvements. This is attributed to the reality that South African rural-based schools are disadvantaged and neglected in comparison to the government's urban schools. One of the significant milestones in history was in 1994 when the African National Congress (ANC) won the elections.

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With the end of apartheid in 1994, there was a perception that the South African education would improve, especially in rural-based schools. However, previous works by researchers such as Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), Msila (2010), and Mugovhani (2011) have highlighted a long-standing challenge faced by rural-based schools in bolstering quality education for learners. One of the significant issues facing rural-based schools in South Africa after 1994 is the lack of infrastructure and poor funding from the state (Yende & Yende 2022b). Indeed, ever since South Africa attained political freedom, there has been substantial development in South African education. Nevertheless, other studies have highlighted that rural-based schools struggle with isolation issues, under-funding and lack of qualified staff (De Villiers 2015; Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Mugovhani 2011; Yende & Yende 2022b). As Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) argue:

Rural schools face severe challenges that are unique to their environment. A lack of parental interest in children's education, insufficient funding from the state, a lack of resources, underqualified teachers, and multi-grade teaching are some of the barriers to effective education. (p. 1)

In addition, Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) reveal that today's difficult conditions for rural-based schools have been exacerbated by a wide range of internal and external factors, including local communities and educational authorities and factors from school structures. Studies by Shikalepo (2020) and Uleanya (2022) reveal that the challenges faced by rural-based schools in South Africa contribute to the lack of delivery of high-quality education. The lack of proper infrastructure required for improving education tends to affect the reading and writing of learners in rural-based schools in South Africa (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Msila 2010).

Scholars have pointed out that even though South African rural-based schools remain isolated and underdeveloped, music education has played an essential role in improving reading and writing English and other African languages for learners (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Yende 2021). This was substantiated by Hugo and Horn (2013) who state that, in Africa, learning a second language such as English can be an intimidating task; however, using music in the classroom can make it an interesting experience for learners. Evidently, singing in the English language may help learners to increase ability to speak, read and write the language words accurately (Sihvola & Gafor 2019). Gordon, Fehd and McCandliss (2015) confirm that music education helps learners improve their reading and writing skills. Music education has significant benefits and is helpful to learners' reading ability (Yende 2018). According to Yende (2018:6), music education favours learners' cognitive performance in class, helps them develop social skills, and gives them an outlet for their creativity, all of which are important for learners' growth.

The motivation for this article is that not much empirical research has been done to examine the effectiveness of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing.

This gap in the research area has also been emphasised in previous studies, which found that further research is still required to investigate the importance of improving music education in rural-based schools in South Africa (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Mugovhani 2011; Yende 2018).

Research questions

Therefore, to keep up to date with existing studies, the following research questions were developed:

- What are the unique challenges faced by rural-based schools in South Africa regarding the incorporation of music in improving language proficiency?
- What are the challenges that music educators in rural-based schools experience?
- What is the role of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing?
- What could be done to improve music education in rural-based schools in South Africa?

Global and local attention has been given to music education, especially in rural-based schools (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; De Villiers 2015; Delpont & Cloete 2015; Gordon et al. 2015). One of the unique roles of music for learners that remains uncontested is that music education enhances cognitive development for learners, particularly with critical thinking and language acquisition (Mapaya 2011; Salmon 2010; Uleanya 2022). Therefore, there is an urgent need to look holistically at the importance of improving music education in rural-based schools in South Africa.

Theoretical framework

In this article, the researcher employed Edwin Gordon's (1980) music learning theory and Covington and Lord's (1994) music cognitive theory. The justification for adopting these theories was that these theories provide different perspectives on how learners acquire and develop reading and writing skills in English. Contemporary literature points out that music learning theory along with the cognitive-constructivist approach promotes a holistic approach to reading and writing, focusing on meaning-making and comprehension (Pozo 2022; Shively 2015). It integrates reading and writing activities within authentic contexts, encouraging learners to engage with meaningful texts and use language in purposeful ways.

Music learning theory is a comprehensive theory to improve reading and writing in the classroom (Azzara 1991; Woodford 1996). In a classroom setting, music education can improve a learner's language cognitive skills, including phonemic and phonological awareness, reading comprehension, vocabulary development, listening, and speech (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; Bautista et al. 2022; Marshall 2018). This was observed by Marshall (2018), who points out that:

Music learning theory principles guide music teachers of all stripes – early childhood, elementary general, instrumental, vocal, the private studio – in establishing sequential curricular goals in accord with their own teaching styles and beliefs. (p. 1)

It is also important that music learning theory has gained popularity and gradually developed as a critical theory for music education (Azzara 1991; Marshall 2018; Woodford 1996).

Furthermore, the cognitive-constructivist approach views literacy development as an active and constructive process that can be achieved through music (Shively 2015). In a music context, the cognitive-constructivist approach focuses on learners' prior knowledge, experiences, and socio-cultural contexts (Palmer 2007; Pozo 2022; Shively 2015). Learners through music engage in authentic reading and writing tasks, problem-solving, and collaborative activities to construct meaning and develop language skills (Abraham, Shifres & Justel 2019; Khalil et al. 2019).

Evidently, incorporating music learning theory along with the cognitive-constructivist approach in the classroom, educators can enhance language learning (English) through songs. These exercises support phonemic awareness or vocabulary development to learners. The use of music can provide additional engagement and motivation in the English language learning process. This was supported by Arasomwan and Mashiy (2021), Paquette and Rieg (2008), and Woodford (1996), who claim that when children learn their native speech through music, they develop five vocabularies: hearing, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing. According to research by Arasomwan and Mashiy, music education is important for reading. It helps learners develop significant spoken language proficiency.

Rural music educators can be guided by these theories to provide a meaningful and engaging context for literacy development. Music educators in rural schools can select songs that have traditional instruments such as acoustic guitar and marimba to make it more comfortable and motivating for learners to learn English. Songs that have sound rhythms that align with the learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can improve English. This creates a connection between the music and the learners' experiences, enhancing their motivation to engage with the English language and improving their reading and writing skills within a familiar and relevant context (Abraham et al. 2019; Hasanah 2017; Sihvola & Gafor 2019). It is inevitable that incorporating music learning theory along with the cognitive-constructivist approach can be more effective in helping learners to acquire a second language (English).

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative research methodology within the constructivist paradigm to discuss the challenges that learners in rural-based schools face. The researcher chose a qualitative research methodology because the focus of this article was to discuss the effectiveness of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing in rural-based schools. The use of qualitative content analysis in this article proved appropriate considering that this approach entails systematically reading through and interpreting the content

of written or visual sources with the goal to obtain insightful conclusions and identify patterns or themes (eds. Denzin & Lincoln 2017). Various scholars concur that qualitative content analysis is crucial in research because it focuses on unique patterns and themes that demonstrate the wide range of meanings associated with the phenomenon rather than the statistical relevance of the frequency of specific texts or concepts (Mayring 2000; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas 2013). In this article, the researcher was able to examine and assess textual data in a systematic and accurate manner using content analysis. Qualitative content analysis can be used to analyse various types of data, but generally the data need to be transformed into written text before analysis can start. If the data come from existing texts, the choice of the content must be justified by what you want to know (Patton 2002). According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), when a researcher is working in an interpretive paradigm, qualitative content analysis is an achievable alternative to more traditional quantitative content analysis. The objective of qualitative content analysis is to pinpoint significant themes or categories within a body of text and to offer a thorough account of the social reality those themes or categories create as it is experienced in a specific environment (Vaismoradi et al. 2013).

In this qualitative research methodology, content analysis was employed as a unique design to achieve the set goals of this article. The justification for choosing a content analysis as a design can be gleaned from Mayring's (2000) definition. The definition asserts that content analysis is a research design extensively utilised to govern the existence of specific patterns, words, themes, theories, or concepts in a set of qualitative data (text). Scholars such as Vaismoradi et al. (2013) point out that through content analysis, researchers can extensively analyse and systematically determine how often certain themes are discussed and consider what is said in relation to each theme. Hence, the justification for selecting content analysis as the design was that it assisted the researcher in having in-depth insight and accurately explaining themes using the scientific body of literature.

Findings of this article

An overview of the findings obtained using the formulated question indicates that rural-based schools find it challenging to develop strong reading and writing abilities in their learners due to the inferior quality of the educational system, which lowers educational achievement. The findings revealed that rural-based schools now use music education as an effective mechanism to foster the reading and writing of languages in the classroom.

The article findings established common themes from the four basic questions developed earlier:

- What are the unique challenges faced by rural-based schools in South Africa?
- What challenges do music educators in rural-based schools experience?

- What is the role of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing?
- What could be done to improve music education in rural-based schools in South Africa?

These questions were answered using scholarly literary writings.

Music and the African culture

In African culture, music is essential for communication, storytelling, cultural expression, and fostering community cohesiveness (Lebaka 2018; Mapaya 2011; Mugovhani 2012). Many African communities, according to various researchers, have a strong oral tradition in which knowledge, history, and cultural practices are transmitted orally from one generation to the next (Lebaka 2018; Yende & Yende 2022a). In this oral tradition, music is crucial since songs are how stories, legends, and cultural values are passed down from one generation to the next. Idang (2018) asserts that music is a crucial component of African cultural identity. In Africa, each ethnic group and community has its own unique musical customs, practices, and equipment. As a reflection of the distinctive cultural history of various African communities, these musical traditions are tightly linked to certain rites, celebrations, and social gatherings (Bartolome 2018; Msila 2023). The great diversity of cultures, languages, and customs present on the continent is reflected in the complexity and depth of African music. African music is still developing and adapting, fusing traditional components with contemporary influences, and adding to the thriving international music industry. It continues to be a crucial component of African cultural heritage, building bonds between neighbours, protecting the past, and honouring the many different identities of Africans (Mapaya 2011; Mkhombo 2019). Since African music and culture are intimately intertwined, it is crucial to choose songs that are age and culturally appropriate as well as those that support the learning objectives when using music to teach English (Biasutti 2018 & Concinaw; Sihvola & Gafor 2019). To actively immerse learners in the learning process, music educators might involve them in interactive activities including singing, role-playing, and group discussions. Teachers can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports language learning, cultural awareness, and overall language competency by incorporating music into language instruction.

Unique challenges faced by rural-based schools in South Africa

South African rural-based schools experience unique severe challenges that are attributed to the legacy of the apartheid regime (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; De Villiers 2015; Du Plessis & Mestry 2019). Even though a significant turning point in history occurred in 1994, which included changes made to improve education in marginalised communities, public schools in rural-based communities in African countries are frequently categorised by several issues that have a detrimental effect on the delivery of high-quality

education (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Msila 2010). Often, rural-based schools are isolated and underdeveloped with poor infrastructure. In highlighting the challenges faced by rural-based schools, (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019) point out that:

... one of the most serious challenges facing rural schools is the employment and retention of qualified teachers with good teaching records. Teachers are reluctant to work or stay in rural areas due to the lack of access to professional opportunities and taking on multiple duties without proper financial compensation. The challenges of teaching in rural schools in South Africa are often left unattended by policymakers and others. (p. 6)

In 1994, there was a claim that all would be afforded quality education. However, the challenges rural-based schools face have proven that this issue has not been adequately addressed. Myende and Maifala (2020) demonstrate that South African rural-based schools generally continue to experience excessive poverty and poor-quality education. Rural-based schools are often offered fewer educational opportunities than urban schools in South Africa (Nortjie 2017; Yende 2021).

A study by Yende (2021) found numerous challenges rural-based schools face, including poor infrastructure and a lack of basic facilities for teaching and learning. Yende points out that, in South Africa, rural-based schools lack basic facilities, including textbooks, proper teaching rooms, electricity, running water, and decent restrooms. The lack of infrastructure in rural-based schools is substantiated by Du Plessis and Mestry (2019). Curriculum-related concerns may be almost overridden by the greater urgent need for improving resources for efficient teaching and learning, especially for music education. The study by Du Plessis and Mestry revealed that if the DBE wants to improve teaching and learning in rural-based schools, emphasis must be placed on curriculum delivery as the lifeblood of schooling.

Various scholars admit that to promote the value of music education sufficient resources in rural schools is a necessity (Madolo & Yende 2023; Robison & Russell 2021a). Even in the absence of conventional instruments like pianos, music instruction may still be useful and enjoyable for kids in remote locations by adopting creative ways, utilising existing resources, and encouraging community interaction (Mkhombo 2019; Yende & Yende 2023). Even though the number of pianos in the school may be restricted, think about adding simpler Orff instruments (xylophones, metallophones), recorders, ukuleles, hand percussion instruments, or recorders. These instruments can offer chances for ensemble playing and fundamental music education (De Villiers 2015; Delpert & Cloete 2015; Oellermann 2020).

Music educators can choose songs to use in language lessons based on the interests, age, and level of language skills of their learners. They can also create exercises that promote active participation, such as lyric analysis, and karaoke-style performances, or they can make music videos (Bokiev et al. 2018; Ludke 2009; Sihvola & Gafor 2019). Educators may

create a dynamic and successful language learning environment that fosters learners' relaxation, vocabulary growth, rhythmical language acquisition, and cultural awareness using music (Ludke 2009; Sihvola & Gafor 2019). The use of music in teaching languages such as English has several advantages, including relaxation, vocabulary expansion, and rhythmic reinforcement of particular words required for language development (Ludke 2009). Rhythm helps learners identify and internalise language chunks and patterns. Since English as a language has recurring phrases or collocations with consistent rhythmic structures rhythm can assist learners to improve their pronunciation (Sihvola & Gafor 2019; Welch 2012). Learners can enhance their pronunciation and intonation, sounding more natural and fluent, by comprehending and practising a language's rhythm through exercises like clapping or tapping out syllables (Mielonen & Paterson 2009; Sihvola & Gafor 2019).

Various scholars point out the high cost of musical instruments can indeed present a significant challenge for rural-based schools when it comes to promoting music education (De Villiers 2015; Delpont & Cloete 2015; Oellermann 2020; Yende & Madolo 2023). These are some of the challenges that have hindered the success of music education in rural-based schools of South Africa.

Challenges that music educators in rural-based schools experience

Previous studies have pointed out various challenges music educators face in South African rural-based schools (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; De Villiers 2015). Apart from the noted challenges rural-based schools experience, Isbell (2005) highlights that music educators face challenges with the low enrolment of learners in music education. This resonates with Du Plessis and Mestry's (2019) findings. The authors point out that many rural-based learners do not attend school regularly, as they are required to work on farms. They are not motivated to attend school (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019). This is particularly true in Africa, especially in rural South African schools, where few learners perform well in their studies (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021). Another serious challenge faced by rural-based music educators was highlighted by Robison and Russell (2021), who established that rural music teachers, especially those in remote areas, can sometimes feel isolated relative to opportunities for face-to-face interactions with other music educators.

This was supported by Savage (2021) who states that the neglect of music as a subject in schools is a concern in many educational systems around the world. In their studies, Ntshole, Mugovhani and Yende (2023) state that in South African educational system there is a strong emphasis on core subjects such as mathematics, science, and language arts. As a result, subjects like music, art, and physical education are often neglected and marginalised or seen as less essential (Ntshole et al. 2023). This prioritisation of core subjects can lead to a decreased focus on music education. It is regrettable that music is frequently overlooked in South

African public schools for a variety of reasons. The reasons for this neglect, according to Yende and Madolo (2023), include certain universal elements including curriculum focus, resource limitations, and cultural attitudes. This was corroborated by Ntshole et al. (2023), who claim that South African rural public schools experience resource limitations due to low budgets, a shortage of musical equipment, and poor facilities. These restrictions make it difficult for schools to create extensive music programmes and give children access to high-quality music education.

This is predominantly real in South Africa and other emerging countries worldwide, where many music educators do not receive the necessary support from the government. This may contribute to the challenges faced by music educators. It is essential to mention that although in South Africa the government is increasingly concerned with issues that affect quality education, the focus is mainly on urban schools and leaves the rural-based schools unattended (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019; Hlalele 2012; Msila 2010). Furthermore, purchasing music instruments can be costly, especially for rural-based schools with limited financial resources (Isbell 2005; Robison & Russell 2021b; Van Vuuren 2010). According to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), the financial constraints faced by rural-based schools pose significant challenges in establishing and maintaining a music programme in schools.

Role of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing

Music education fosters reading and writing abilities for learners, especially in early childhood care and education (ECCE) (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; Gordon et al. 2015). This was revealed by Arasomwan and Mashiy (2021), who affirm that music plays an essential role in developing basic communication skills for learners: the ability to read, write, listen, and speak. Dumont et al. (2017) further point out that using music in the classroom increases the learners' interest and enthusiasm to learn. Several scholars have agreed that using music to teach any subject aids in learning, creates a suitable atmosphere for studying, and encourages social contact among learners, all of which contribute to the development of ECCE learners. Early research by Dumont et al. found that engaging in musical activities such as listening to the vocabulary used in songs, learning, and playing music engages various interrelated brain regions crucial for reading and writing. While certain components of music education use the brain's plasticity to directly develop important skills, other components highlight extra talents by favourably influencing how children think (Biasutti & Concina 2018).

According to music psychologists, learning music works the learner's left side of the brain, which also engages in language comprehension. Learning with music helps learners improve the verbal and listening abilities required for spoken language communication. It follows that pronunciation is also improved by singing and repeating songs accompanied by

the piano to enhance the experience. Improving learners' diverse communication abilities is a significant goal of music education. This finding was supported by Arasomwan and Mashiy (2021), who affirm that music education significantly affects reading ability development in the classroom. Below are two songs for different groups, which are children and teenagers.

Children: 'Montharena'

[Verse 1] In January, we start the year,
February brings love and cheer.
March comes in like a lion bold,
April showers, May flowers unfold.

[Chorus] Oh, let's dance to the months' macarena,
Learning the calendar, oh so fun and clever.
Sing and sway, as we move along,
Teaching the months with this catchy song!

[Verse 2] June brings summer, the sun shining bright,
July and August, vacation's in sight.
September starts a new school year,
October brings costumes and spooky cheer.

[Chorus] Oh, let's dance to the months' macarena,
Learning the calendar, oh so fun and clever.
Sing and sway, as we move along,
Teaching the months with this catchy song!

[Bridge] November's Thanksgiving, a time to give thanks,
December's filled with joy, Christmas in ranks.
Through the year, we'll sing and learn,
Remembering each month's turn.

[Chorus] Oh, let's dance to the months' macarena,
Learning the calendar, oh so fun and clever.
Sing and sway, as we move along,
Teaching the months with this catchy song!

[Outro] So join the dance, let's sing along,
Learning the months, it's never wrong.
With the macarena and a joyful tune,
We'll remember the months, all in tune!

This song is an excellent example of educating learners about the months of the year. The educational experiences of learners can be improved by combining a well-known song, such as 'Macarena', into a song about the months. Activities that involve singing aloud help children recall knowledge more successfully, and including a dance routine can increase their interest and excitement even more.

Teenagers: 'My Favorite Things'

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens
Bright copper kettles and warm woollen mittens
Brown paper packages tied up with strings
These are a few of my favourite things.

Cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudels
Doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings
These are a few of my favourite things.

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes
Silver-white winters that melt into springs
These are a few of my favourite things.

When the dog bites
When the bee stings
When I'm feeling sad
I simply remember my favourite things

And then I don't feel so bad

This song, adapted from the 1959 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *The Sound of Music*, can help beginners master basic grammar rules. You can use this song to practise imperatives. Along with the beat, learners can clap or stomp while listening for verbs like 'get on your feet', 'clap your hands', or 'stomp your feet'. It makes learning engaging and participatory while reinforcing the usage of imperatives. Evidently, activities based on these songs can be developed by music educators, including gap-filling exercises, recreating the lyrics with grammar corrections, and discussions on the significance and context of the grammar structures utilised (Mielonen & Paterson 2009; Sihvola & Gafor 2019). Some creative thinking and engagement are added to the learning process when songs are used as a tool to teach English grammar in the classroom (Hasanah 2017; Ludke 2009).

Expanding learners' vocabulary and comprehension of musical terms, concepts, and terminology crucial and is commonly referred to as vocabulary branching in the context of music (Hasanah 2017; Sihvola & Gafor 2019). The above selected songs are good examples as they involve exploring different branches or categories within music to discover and learn new words, techniques, and musical ideas. According to researchers like Kuśnierek (2016), and Paquette and Rieg (2008), music is crucial for vocabulary branching; therefore, using this strategy can assist learners increase their musical awareness and knowledge. Evidently, in the selected songs, vocabulary branching is demonstrated and seen as an ongoing process that encourages learners to explore and expand their knowledge of musical terms and concepts across different branches or categories of music. It helps them develop a broader musical and language vocabulary and enhances their ability to communicate, analyse, and create music effectively (Kuśnierek 2016; Mielonen & Paterson 2009; Sihvola & Gafor 2019).

Improve music education in rural-based schools in South Africa

Several studies have pointed out that much needs to be done to improve the conditions of music education in rural-based schools in South Africa (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021;

De Villiers 2015). Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) highlight that to improve all the challenges faced by South African rural-based schools, the government, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders must come on board and address issues affecting rural-based schools.

The issues include the lack of essential infrastructure to enable music educators and learners to function efficiently and effectively in schools. The DBE should hire qualified music educators to teach in rural-based schools in South Africa (Arasomwan & Mashiy 2021; Magagula, Mugovhani & Yende 2022). This was substantiated by Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), Msila (2010), and Myende and Maifala (2020), who affirm that the main source of improving the condition of music education in rural-based schools in South Africa lies with the DBE for improving the teaching environment by providing the resources that contribute to good performance in schools. Thus, it is essential for the DBE to support newly qualified music educators and grant them access to teaching learners in rural-based schools. Music educators may integrate musical activities in their lesson plans, such as singing sessions, lyric analysis, group performances, or developing music-themed projects, to effectively use music in rural schools. It is crucial to select songs that fit the learners' language proficiency level, are age appropriate, and reflect their culture (Hasanah 2017; Sihvola & Gafor 2019).

Discussion

This article sought to discuss critically the effectiveness of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing in rural-based schools. This article argued that unique challenges faced by South African rural-based schools can be attributed to the legacy of the apartheid regime. The article highlighted that since the demise of the apartheid regime in the 1990s, the South African government has been attempting to improve quality education. However, this improvement is more evident in urban schools than in rural schools.

This article also highlighted that even though curriculum transformation has been a significant debate in South Africa, there has been minimal effort to improve it according to the demands of rural-based schools. The DBE has been attempting to improve education in rural-based schools. However, due to insufficient resources and geographic isolation, rural-based schools have not improved learners' performance.

Consistent with previous research by Myende and Maifala (2020), the findings of the current study reveal the importance and need for DBE to be at the forefront in the promotion of quality and effective music education in rural-based schools. This could be achieved through the DBE providing the necessary infrastructure for marginalised schools in South Africa.

The findings of this article are based on the reviewed literature written by scholars who admit that there is a need

for the DBE to employ qualified music educators in rural-based schools. In addition, the findings revealed that most rural-based schools do not have qualified music educators, contributing to the neglect of music education in schools. The findings of this article pointed out that learners from rural-based communities are deprived of proper music resources, which make them unable to connect to their culture and express their indigenous music. The findings of this article are in line with the study by Arasomwan and Mashiy (2021), which affirms that music education plays an important role in the classroom.

This article found that a significant challenge faced by music educators in rural-based schools compared to urban schools is isolation and lack of opportunities for developing music education classrooms. Rural-based public schools are faced with serious challenges regarding music, and these include lack of funding from the government, lack of instruments, lack of access to instruments, inadequate instrument skills and lack of training (Yende & Madolo 2023). These challenges can be overcome by providing accessibility to instruments, developing collaborations with instrument makers or music groups, promoting music education efforts, and supporting instrument repair and maintenance services, to name just a few strategies. These efforts can help address the lack of instruments and enhance opportunities for musical expression and exploration. The findings of this article revealed that it is important for the South African government to give music education in rural-based schools value. The findings of this article also revealed that the teaching environment for music education in rural-based schools is a significant factor that affects quality education. The effectiveness of music education in rural-based schools lies in a good teaching environment that requires the improvement of infrastructure by the DBE with relevant stakeholders.

Again, the findings of the current article show that music education is imperative for learners in all grades as it fosters excellent reading and writing abilities. This finding corroborates the results of Arasomwan and Mashiy (2021), who found that music education plays an essential role in developing the basic communication skills of learners. These skills are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This article has established that the role of music education cannot be overlooked, as music aids learners in learning any subject. This finding is congruent with the findings of previous studies (Delpont & Cloete 2015; Gordon et al. 2015), which affirm that music education plays a crucial role in the classroom.

Evidently, the DBE should improve the conditions of music education in rural-based schools in South Africa. Music education has a role in developing the basic communication skills of learners. The results of this article demonstrate that music education should be improved as it contributes to learners' effective reading and writing skills. The study findings show that music education promotes quality education for learners in rural-based schools. This finding

aligns with the music learning theory that finds that music promotes improved reading and writing in the classroom (Gordon 1980).

Recommendations

Based on these findings and reflecting on the study, the following recommendations are made.

First, since this article was limited to content analysis, the researcher recommends that further research should be conducted on a broader scale where methodologies such as interviews can be implemented with all relevant parties. This may deepen the understanding of the importance of music education in rural-based schools in South Africa.

Second, it is recommended that the DBE should take the initiative to promote music education in rural-based schools in South Africa by providing the necessary resources.

Third, the DBE should work with universities and hire qualified music educators with extensive music and education knowledge.

Fourth, South African rural-based schools can reach out to individuals, entities, and music business entities asking for donation instrument donation programmes. Several individuals are eager to donate their unused musical instruments to a school in need because they have them lying about their homes. Local music shops may also have knowledge of projects or programmes that facilitate the donation of musical instruments.

Lastly, government and all relevant stakeholders should join forces and fund the use of musical instruments such as pianos, guitars, and violins in rural-based schools. This will ensure that both rural and urban schools have quality education in South Africa.

Conclusion

This article found that poverty in South African rural areas has significant consequences for establishing quality education, especially music education. Musical instruments are expensive and there is a need to purchase instruments to be able to use music in classrooms. This article found that problems South African rural-based schools face affect music learners' success. This article confirmed an urgency to improve music education in rural-based schools. Music education is perceived as a significant contributor to developing basic communication skills for learners. This study also pointed out that music has the potential to develop strong readability and writing skills for learners.

Using a framework of analysis largely informed by the central tenets of Gordon's (1980) music learning theory and Covington and Lord's (1994) music cognitive theory, this article discussed the effectiveness of music education in developing and fostering reading and writing in rural-based schools. The

article has confirmed and agreed that music education is important for reading and helps learners develop significant spoken language proficiency. The approach and analysis in the article were informed by what the researcher views as a nexus that gradually grew in education as a key for effective development for reading and writing, especially in South African rural-based schools. Increasingly, rural-based schools now implement music education to enhance learners' reading and writing skills in the classroom. Recently, there is an increasing improvement in music education in South African rural-based schools. With these improvements, one can assert increased transformation if the following are instituted: qualified music educators, proper infrastructure, and funding.

In conclusion, this article affirms that music education is essential in developing and fostering the reading and writing of languages in rural-based schools. However, this calls for the DBE to provide proper music infrastructures in rural-based schools.

Implications of the study

The findings may have significant implications for curriculum advisors, DBE, policymakers, and other relevant South African stakeholders. This article confirmed that music education plays an essential role in improving reading and writing for learners and promoting effective communication skills for learners in the classroom. Curriculum designers and policy advisors should therefore work together to ensure that their curriculum, known as Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), is well structured to accommodate and benefit rural-based schools. Music education should be implemented as an independent subject in the curriculum to ensure learners acquire the necessary communication skills.

Limitations of the study

Research projects have limitations. The scope of this article was limited as its design was a qualitative content analysis that focused only on the challenges faced by music education in South African rural-based schools. However, the result is that the findings of this article cannot be generalised to other countries, but they can raise an awareness of the lack of equipment in schools and the need to use music to promote language proficiency.

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The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Author's contributions

S.J.Y. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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