



Rural Early Childhood Educators' Perception of Music-Based Pedagogy in Teaching Communication Skills to Children

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood care and Education is an important phase for impacting communication skills to children for building a strong sense of identity and belonging. The South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) regards communication skills as one of the six early learning and development areas considered for Early Childhood and Education (ECCE). Caps Grade R admonishes educators to support learners with interpersonal Communication Skills and to develop their Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency by engaging them in activities that focus on rhymes. Thus, South African children need skillful educators to employ developmental implementation strategies to support their acquisition of these skills. Research shows that subjects like Life Skills, English Language, Civic Education, and Mathematics are successfully implemented using music-based pedagogy. However, because ECCE is relatively new in South Africa, there is no strong structure to support the ECCE/ECD (Early Childhood Development) educators in employing music-based pedagogies to teach communication skills to the children. This article focuses on the rural ECD/ECCE educators' perception and experiences in employing music-based pedagogy to support the children's acquisition of communication skills. The study was conducted at two ECD/ECCE centres in Northern Cape province, South Africa. This is participatory visual research where Six ECD/ECCE Educators were engaged in semi-structured interviews and reflective activities on how they facilitate communication skills using music. The study was informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The educators supported music-based pedagogy, however, inadequate musical training, non-availability of musical resources, and non-inclusion of music as an independent subject in the CAPS/NRF documents are their constraints. In their pre-service teacher education programs, almost all South African institutions include creative arts training; the course is typically taught over one semester, and music is merely one of the various creative arts subfields. As a result, the pre-service teachers lack the necessary musical background to implement music-based instruction. In conclusion, the study recommends musical intervention training to empower ECD/ECCE educators.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no specification or emphasis in the NCF document about music-based pedagogy in the ECCE classroom. Since most of the rural ECD/ECCE combine children ages four and five in the same classroom, the study aimed to explore the Rural ECD/ECCE educators' experiences in employing music-based pedagogy to support the children's acquisition of communication skills. This article focuses on the rural ECD/ECCE

educators' perception and experiences in employing music-based pedagogy to support the children's acquisition of communication skills.

According to Visser, et.al., "Early childhood development (ECD) programs or services are planned activities designed to promote the emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children from birth to nine years of age, and to intervene in the lives of children at risk and may include a range of services such as education, health, and social protection."¹ Learners in rural Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are the subject of the current study. The care and education of children from birth to age four, before the start of Grade R, is referred to as early childhood care and education.² Due to the special needs of ECCE learners, it is necessary to use certain pedagogies to aid in the development of their fundamental abilities.

According to research, many young rural children under the age of five come from low socioeconomic homes and encounter difficulties that hinder their readiness for future education.³ Additionally, the ECD/ECCE in the rural context are characterized by overcrowded classrooms, poor learning environment, lack of parental participation in their children's learning, low socio-economic status, unqualified educators, lack of basic learning materials, sexual abuse, health challenges undernutrition, and stunted growth.⁴ To help these kids learn the necessary skills, there is a need for qualified educators who are familiar with a range of child-centered pedagogies.⁵ According to the authors, young children require teachers who are knowledgeable about the best teaching methods because of their nature, traits, and learning styles, which are very different from those of adolescents and adults.

Since ECCE learners lack the ability to speak effectively, Adams-Ojugbele and Moletsane contend that studying young children via a developmental lens enables educators to better understand their needs and how to best support their learning.⁶

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) document also suggests that adults speak, sing, read, and listen to young children to support them as they learn to speak and listen, and eventually to read and write.⁷ Based on this, researchers suggested employing music as one of the implementation tactics to engage with ECCE learners and enhance the development of their communication skills.⁸ These authors added that

¹ Marieta Visser et al., "The Challenges Experienced by Practitioners from Under-Resourced Early Childhood Development Centres in South Africa: A Single Site Study," *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy* 51, no. 3 (2021): 14–24.

² Giulietta D. Harrison, "A Snapshot of Early Childhood Care and Education in South Africa: Institutional Offerings, Challenges and Recommendations," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 10, no. 1 (August 24, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v10i1.797>; E. Ring, L. O' Sullivan, and E. Wall, "Resisting the 'Schoolification Epidemic' in Early Childhood Education," in *Critical Issues in Early Childhood Teacher Education*, ed. I. Jones and M. Lin (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2020), 79–104; Ashnie Mahadew and Dipane J Hlalele, "Understanding Inclusion in Early Childhood Care and Education: A Participatory Action Learning and Action Research Study," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1073.

³ Lieschen Venter, "A Systems Perspective on Early Childhood Development Education in South Africa," *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 16, no. 1 (2022): 1–25; Iheoma U. Iruka et al., "Examining How Rural Ecological Contexts Influence Children's Early Learning Opportunities," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 52 (March 2020): 15–29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2019.09.005>.

⁴ Jesus DC Gil et al., "Early Childhood Suspected Developmental Delay in 63 Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Large within- and between-Country Inequalities Documented Using National Health Surveys," *Journal of Global Health* 10, no. 1 (June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.7189/jogh.10.010427>; Iruka et al., "Examining How Rural Ecological Contexts Influence Children's Early Learning Opportunities."

⁵ Dm Hannaway, "Transformed Teachers Transform Education: Insights Shared by Early Childhood Lecturers," *Cogent Education* 9, no. 1 (2022): 2118951; Pam P Zulu, Adebunmi Y Aina, and Keshni Bipath, "Education and Training Experiences of Early Childhood Care and Education Practitioners in Rural and Urban Settings of Durban, South Africa," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1167.

⁶ Rasheedah O. Adams-Ojugbele and Relebohile Moletsane, "Towards Quality Early Childhood Development for Refugee Children: An Exploratory Study of a Grade R Class in a Durban Child Care Centre," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 9, no. 1 (July 10, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v9i1.616>.

⁷ Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four* (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015), 40.

⁸ Jessica Lawson-Adams, David K Dickinson, and J Kayle Donner, "Sing It or Speak It?: The Effects of Sung and Rhythmically Spoken Songs on Preschool Children's Word Learning," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 58 (2022): 87–102; Deborah A. Arasomwan and Nontokozi J. Mashiy, "Early Childhood Care and Education Educators' Understanding of the Use of Music-Based Pedagogies to Teach Communication Skills," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 11, no. 1 (July 9, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v11i1.896>; Amanda Niland and Jill Holland,

employing a variety of songs, rhymes, role plays, dance, and musical games in the ECCE classroom will help to attend to the multi-dimensional developmental requirements of children. Thus, this participatory case study aims to explore the rural ECD/ECCE educators' experience in using music to teach communication skills to children. Researching their perspectives will help to unearth their constrain and provide reinforcement that will enhance their effectiveness in using music-based pedagogy.

Communication is the most important factor for young children's learning and social development, and it is one of the six learning areas designed for ECCE in the NCF and CAPS. There are various approaches to communication in the ECD/ECCE phase, and these include "dance, music, art, pictures, singing, body movement, and creative play."⁹ Khaghaninejad et al. and DBE found that music and communication share certain characteristics and that using music as a pedagogical strategy for teaching reading and listening skills to ECCE learners is therefore appropriate.¹⁰ Thus, this participatory case study engages six ECD rural educators through reflective activities and interviews to elicit their experiences and perceptions on how they support the learners with the acquisition of communication skills through music-based pedagogy. This study aligns with Vygotsky's SCT Theory since it attempts to explore and transform ECCE/ECD educators' perspectives on music-based pedagogy for ECCE/ECD classrooms. According to Vygotsky, to help learners gradually acquire new knowledge and skills, someone who is more knowledgeable about a task, process, or concept than the learner should scaffold the learners' knowledge by facilitating their participation in a variety of activities on a regular basis.¹¹ As a result, ECD/ECCE educators use a variety of developmentally appropriate music as do others who are more skilled to help the learners learn communication skills. Thus, using a qualitative case study design, Six ECD/ECCE Educators were engaged in semi-structured interviews and reflective activities on how they facilitate communication skills using music. Their views are presented in subsequent sections. This is preceded by a literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural ECD Educators' Experiences of using Music as an Implementation Strategy

One of the educational agendas of the South African government is the provision of Early Childhood Development (ECD) education for all children particularly those from low economy and under-resourced contexts. Effective and efficient educators emerge as determinant factors for the comprehensive interpretation of curriculum at all levels of education. This sentence is buttressed by Bawani, and Mphahlele, who posit that children's acquisition of sustainable skills at the foundation levels sorely depends on well-learned and skilful educators.¹² They are also viewed as significant resources that aid the achievement of stated learning goals and objectives through their critical thinking and innovatively implementing the curriculum.¹³ Given the significant role of educators in the holistic development of early childhood, Choiriyah, in her article advocated for educators who are well-equipped with developmentally appropriate teaching strategies, interested in children, and willing to impart lifelong skills.¹⁴ However, the ECD/ECCE rural educators are faced with a series of experiences in carrying out their teaching role to the children.

"Journeys towards Empowerment: Educators Sharing Their Musical Cultural Identities with Children," *International Journal of Music in Early Childhood* 14, no. 1 (June 1, 2019): 71–88, https://doi.org/10.1386/ijmec.14.1.71_1.

⁹ Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four*, 41.

¹⁰ Mohammad Saber Khaghaninejad, Hossein Saadabadi Motlagh, and Ramin Chamacham, "How Does Mozart's Music Affect the Reading Comprehension of Iranian EFL Learners of Both Genders?," *Internafional Journal of Humanifies and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, 2016; Department of Basic Education, "Strategy for Teaching English Across the Curriculum," <http://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Manuals/Strategy%20for%20Teaching%20English%20Across%20the%20Curriculum.pdf?ver=2015-04-24-153243-853.pdf>, 2016.

¹¹ Deniz Gökçe Erbil, "A Review of Flipped Classroom and Cooperative Learning Method within the Context of Vygotsky Theory," *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 1157.

¹² Elisa L Bawani and Ramashego S S Mphahlele, "Investigating the Role of Teacher Training of Reception Teachers in Implementing the Pre-Primary Curriculum in Francistown, Botswana," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–14.

¹³ Cynthia Z Zama and Nontokozo Mashiya, "Early Childhood Care and Education Teachers' Experiences of Integrating the Activities of the National Curriculum Framework into Themes," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1089.

¹⁴ Choiriyah Choiriyah, "Science Literacy in Early Childhood: Development of Learning Programs in the Classroom," *Indonesian Journal of Early Childhood Education Studies* 10, no. 2 (2021): 136–42.

Findings from the previous research conducted in the Urban setting of KwaZulu-Natal province disclosed that the majority of ECD educators are struggling with relevant skills needed to teach ECCE learners efficiently and effectively.¹⁵ The educators stated that employing music as an implementation strategy aids the learners' mental and social growth, however, their insufficient musical skills are a constraint. Similarly Zulu, Aina, and Bipath, attested to the above report by stating that young children need to be physically, socially, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, stimulated but the educators are not sufficiently certified as 177 000 are ill-trained for ECD/ECCE.¹⁶

Mbarathi, Mthembu, and Diga pointed out that the rural context practitioners experienced a dearth of teaching resources and are faced with overcrowded classrooms (children-to-teacher ratio).¹⁷ Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner in their research discovered that too many practitioners in the rural context do not possess the knowledge and developmentally appropriate strategies to teach young learners.¹⁸ Other Rural ECD experiences and those of the educators have been researched by various scholars and from various perspectives, but the authors have not focused on how the vulnerable learners in the context, particularly in South Africa can be supported with acquiring communication skills through the employment of music by the educators. This research thus focuses on the gap.

ECCE in the Rural Context

UNICEF reported that the provision of effective ECCE improves the efficiency of the school system, thus leading to a reduction in juvenile delinquency, especially among marginalized people.¹⁹ Hence, there has been global commitment, actions, and plans to ensure equal access to sustainable education for all children. ECCE is understood differently in different developing countries. Colombia, India, and Brazil refer to “day-care centres” whilst Venezuela and Ecuador refer to them as “non-formal day-care centres”.²⁰ Countries such as Jamaica, Kenya, and Peru called it “nutrition and health centres, and countries such as Senegal, Ethiopia, and Ghana simply refer to “workplace childcare.”²¹ In South Africa, ECD is an umbrella term for an all-inclusive approach to programs designed for children from birth to age nine, which is further broken down into the reception year for children aged five, and ECCE for children from birth to four years.²² A rural context refers to a group of people who live in a community that is less developed and not civilized. About 55.5 percent of South Africans live in advent poverty and mostly dwell in the rural community. Aubrey in the report states that education in the rural setting was characterized by segregation, inequality, destitution, trivial education chances for children, and deprivation of life necessities.²³ Other things that could jeopardize the children from attaining their developmental capability in the rural context are a lack of opportunity for professional development of educators,²⁴ malnutrition,²⁵ delay in growth, speech retardation, social withdrawal, delayed cognitive abilities, and retarded psychomotor skill development,²⁶ ignoring the provision of services for the ECCE learners’ in the hands private such as non-

¹⁵ Arasomwan and Mashiy, “Early Childhood Care and Education Educators’ Understanding of the Use of Music-Based Pedagogies to Teach Communication Skills.”

¹⁶ Zulu, Aina, and Bipath, “Education and Training Experiences of Early Childhood Care and Education Practitioners in Rural and Urban Settings of Durban, South Africa.”

¹⁷ Nduta Mbarathi, Mbali Emerald Mthembu, and Kathleen Diga, *Early Childhood Development and South Africa: A Literature Review*. (SARChI Technical Paper #6, University of KwaZulu-Natal., 2016), <http://hdl.handle.net/10413/13338>.

¹⁸ Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E Hyler, and Madelyn Gardner, “Effective Teacher Professional Development.,” 2017.

¹⁹ UNICEF, *Early Childhood Development a Statistical Snapshot* (UNICEF - Kosovo Programme, 2014), https://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/media/191/file/ECD_General_Population_ENG.pdf.

²⁰ Hirokazu Yoshikawa and Sarah Kabay, “The Evidence Base on Early Childhood Care and Education in Global Contexts,” 2015.

²¹ Yoshikawa and Kabay, “The Evidence Base on Early Childhood Care and Education in Global Contexts.”

²² Mbarathi, Mthembu, and Diga, *Early Childhood Development and South Africa: A Literature Review*.

²³ Carol Aubrey, “Sources of Inequality in South African Early Child Development Services,” *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 7, no. 1 (March 22, 2017): 9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v7i1.450>.

²⁴ Maria Du Toit, Jeannie Van der Linde, and De Wet Swanepoel, “Early Childhood Development Risks and Protective Factors in Vulnerable Preschool Children from Low-Income Communities in South Africa,” *Journal of Community Health* 46 (2021): 304–12.

²⁵ Onwaba Makanjana and Ashika Naicker, “Nutritional Status of Children 24–60 Months Attending Early Child Development Centres in a Semi-Rural Community in South Africa,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 1 (December 31, 2020): 261, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010261>.

²⁶ Gabrielle Wills and Jesal Kika Mistry, “Supply-Side and Demand-Side Approaches to Financing Early Childhood Care and Education in South Africa,” *Ilifa Labantwana & Resep ECD Working Paper Series*, 2021.

governmental organizations (NGOs) community-based organizations (CBOs) and religious body.²⁷ The ECD sector, according to Bipath and Aina, is dominated by female employees who work very long hours and are typically underappreciated by the community.²⁸ The uniform finding on ECCE across the globe is the problem of inequality in the provision of services. Most rural areas lack basic ECCE facilities, and sub-Saharan African countries are the most severely affected.²⁹

Why Music and Learning of Communication Skills in ECD/ECCE?

Music is one of the components of creative arts and is taught in virtually all South African teacher training Universities, hence pre-service teachers are given some rudimentary knowledge of music.³⁰ There are many types of music, but this study will only consider the ones relevant to ECCE development. For many years, music in the form of conventional songs, cradle songs, video game music, and traditional music has been confirmed to have a significant effect on young children's learning.

In accordance with current research, the NCF stipulates that learners in the ECCE phase should be allowed to creatively communicate through dramatization, singing, musical play, dance, and exploratory body movement.³¹ The document further states that musical activities help babies, toddlers, and young children to develop their physical skills and creativity, stimulate their memories, and promote socialization, a collaborative spirit, self-discipline, and self-confidence. There is cumulative proof that the use of music as part of an effective teaching strategy in the early childhood classroom has a significant impact on young children's learning of language and communication.³² The inclusion of different forms of music in ECD classrooms stimulates children's creative thinking and emotional expressions.³³ Additionally, the use of rhymes, dramatic play, and songs with musical accompaniment, in the classroom ECD classroom accelerated the acquisition of language and communication skills of the underprivileged and imperiled children.³⁴

Developmentally Appropriate Music for ECD/ECCE Classroom

Some developed and developing countries have been able to adopt a variety of pedagogies in schools, musical pedagogies being one type. Malaysia, Sweden, Australia, Spain, and England use musical pedagogies in the ECCE classroom, and their results show that using musical rhymes is the best teaching strategy for an inclusive ECD classroom.³⁵ Berman added that musical rhymes aid learners' vocabulary development more than traditional rote memorization.³⁶ Bolduc and Evrard, and Cawley, examined the use of a variety of activities, such as bouncing, tickling, wiggling, and finger playing, as a means of aiding children's language and auditory development.³⁷ Additionally, Cloete and Delpont and Van Vreden added that music such as lullabies, folk songs,

²⁷ Arasomwan and Mashiy, "Early Childhood Care and Education Educators' Understanding of the Use of Music-Based Pedagogies to Teach Communication Skills."

²⁸ Zulu, Aina, and Bipath, "Education and Training Experiences of Early Childhood Care and Education Practitioners in Rural and Urban Settings of Durban, South Africa."

²⁹ Daniel N Sifuna, "Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical but Neglected Sector of Education," *Papers in Education and Development*, no. 31 (2012): 129–49.

³⁰ Eurika N. Jansen van Vuuren, "Arts across the Curriculum as a Pedagogic Ally for Primary School Teachers," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 8, no. 1 (March 28, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v8i1.477>.

³¹ Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four*.

³² Lucy Green, "Adapting Popular Musicians' Practices for the Classroom," UCL - Faculty of Education and Society, June 17, 2017, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research-projects/2022/jan/adapting-popular-musicians-practices-classroom>.

³³ Teemu Nikkola, Jyrki Reunamo, and Inkeri Ruokonen, "Children's Creative Thinking Abilities and Social Orientations in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care," *Early Child Development and Care* 192, no. 6 (April 26, 2022): 872–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1813122>.

³⁴ Dawson R. Hancock and Sarah W. Wright, "Enhancing Early Childhood Development Through Arts Integration in Economically Disadvantaged Learning Environments," *The Urban Review* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 430–46, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0440-y>; Michael J. Haslip and Dominic F. Gullo, "The Changing Landscape of Early Childhood Education: Implications for Policy and Practice," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 46, no. 3 (May 23, 2018): 249–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0865-7>.

³⁵ V IROEGBU and F IFEDAYO, "Exploring Rhymes and Songs Strategies in Improving Spoken English Language Skills among Lower Primary School Pupils," *Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 2020, 5–10.

³⁶ A S Berman, "Music as a Second Language," *Teaching Music* 21, no. 4 (2014): 36–39.

³⁷ Jonathan Bolduc and Melanie Evrard, "Music Education from Birth to Five: An Examination of Early Childhood Educators' Music Teaching Practices.," *Research and Issues in Music Education* 13, no. 1 (2017): 3; Jessica Cawley, "The Musical Enculturation of Irish Traditional Musicians: An Ethnographic Study of Learning Processes," 2013.

instrumental music, nature sounds, and video game music have been confirmed to be suitable for promoting children's spatial-temporal reasoning, numerical reasoning, and phonemic awareness.³⁸

A number of other researchers have written on the use of songs and rhymes for ECD/ECCE and Foundation Phase classrooms such as Music for Foundation Phase Learners' Academic Development;³⁹ Music to Support Children's cognitive development;⁴⁰ Music for the Socialization of newly arrived migrant children into Norwegian primary school;⁴¹ Supporting learning of mathematics with music;⁴² integrating music education to teach life skills to primary school learners. However, the focus of this study is exploring Rural ECD/ECCE educators' perception of using music-based pedagogy to support vulnerable children in the rural setting to develop their language skills.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As indicated above, the focus of this participatory qualitative case study was to explore the perception of the rural ECD/ECCE educators on the use of music-based pedagogy in the classroom. To explore these experiences, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was adopted to conduct a single case study at two rural ECD/ECCE centres in Kimberly, Northern Cape, South Africa. The sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of educators as the more knowledgeable others in supporting learners at any level of education to acquire desirable skills.⁴³ The sociocultural theory views language and communication as means through which learners develop higher cognitive skills. The focus of Vygotsky's SCT is the teacher playing the role of a more knowledgeable other (MKO) to support the learners at their zone of proximal development through social interaction. The theory establishes that children develop skills when an adult, such as an educator, caregiver, or parent, provides reinforcement and stimulation. Educators are expected to be mediators by employing a variety of teaching styles to facilitate learners' acquisition of knowledge, rather than owners of knowledge who dispense what they deem necessary. In this study, it is expected of the ECD/ECCE educators to employ a variety of music as an implementation strategy to simplify the learning of communication skills for the children.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative case study, Six ECD/ECCE Educators were engaged in semi-structured interviews and reflective activities on how they facilitate communication skills using music. Participants were chosen using a purposive sample technique based on their experience, number of years spent teaching in ECCE, and openness to engage in the study. This was done after paying visits to the research centres to build friendly relationships with the principals and the educators. This sampling method is in line with Denieffe, and Thomas's argument on the purposive sampling method in research as they posit that it involves making decisions on people, groups of people, or schools which have rich knowledge about the subject under research.⁴⁴ The participants were aged between 17 and 55 years and had acquired experiences of 2 years, 5 years, 6 years, 15 years, 17 years., and 18 yrs., hence they could boldly share their classroom experiences as they pertained to the use of music-based pedagogy.

³⁸ Aletta Delport and Erna Cloete, "Music Education in the Grade R Classroom: How Three Teachers Learned in a Participatory Action Inquiry," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5, no. 1 (September 4, 2015): 21, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v5i1.351>; Mignon Van Vreden, "Maestro for a Moment: A Conceptual Framework for Music Integration in Grade R," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 6, no. 1 (June 21, 2016): 10, <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i1.373>.

³⁹ I. Berson and M. Berson, "Digital Play with Citizen DJ: Innovating with Music in Early Childhood Education," in *EdMedia+ Innovate Learning* (Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE), 2022), 228–31.

⁴⁰ Laura A Bentley et al., "A Translational Application of Music for Preschool Cognitive Development: RCT Evidence for Improved Executive Function, Self-regulation, and School Readiness," *Developmental Science* 26, no. 5 (2023): e13358.

⁴¹ Felicity Burbridge Rinde, "Inclusive Socio-Musical Spaces for Newly Arrived Migrant Children in a Norwegian Primary School: Teacher and School Leader Perspectives," *International Journal of Music Education* 41, no. 3 (2023): 428–42.

⁴² T.J. Hamilton et al., "Teaching Mathematics with Music: A Pilot Study.," in *2018 IEEE International Conference on Teaching, Assessment, and Learning for Engineering (TALE)* (IEEE, 2018), 927–31.

⁴³ Reham Alkhudiry, "The Contribution of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory in Mediating L2 Knowledge Co-Construction," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 12, no. 10 (2022): 2117–23; D. Abrahamson, "Embodiment and Mathematics Learning," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Out-of-School Learning* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017), 248–52, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385198.n98>.

⁴⁴ Suzanne Denieffe, "Commentary: Purposive Sampling: Complex or Simple? Research Case Examples," *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25, no. 8 (2020): 662–63; Fr Baiju Thomas, "The Role of Purposive Sampling Technique as a Tool for Informal Choices in a Social Sciences in Research Methods," *Just Agriculture* 2, no. 5 (2022): 1–8.

The setting was two rural ECD/ECCE contexts, one is a Government and the other is a non-governmental organization. Both are moderately equipped with basic facilities such as electricity, tap water, a well-equipped playground, and beds and mattresses for children ages 0-4 years. However, the human resources are inadequate, the two centres combine children ages four and five in a single classroom. They instructed the children on NCF and CAPS documents. The study was conducted in collaboration with the participants. "Participatory approaches rely on establishing trust and rapport between researchers and participants and advocate actively involving participants in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a research issue."⁴⁵ The participants were engaged to share their experiences on using music-based pedagogies in the ECD/ECCE classroom by creating their own stories through writing, drawing, and photovoice. After the reflective writing, they were engaged in an individual semi-structured interview where they elaborated on the points raised in their reflective writings. The generated data was analyzed thematically, using the combination of deductive and inductive analysis suggested by Miles and Huberman.⁴⁶

Ethical Issues

All ethical measures specified by the SPU Research Ethics Committee were strictly adhered to. Firstly, the researcher visited the educators at the ECD/ECCE centres to establish a cordial relationship with them and brief them on the purpose of the research study. Thereafter, ten interested ECD/ECCE educators who willingly gave their consent to participate were engaged in interaction and interviewed, after which six were selected. The interested participants were provided with informed consent letters which they were to read and willingly sign before taking part in the research. The names of the participants and the description of the school were kept anonymous when publishing this result. In addition, the devices for recording during interviews are pass-warded to ensure the confidentiality of their information. Copies of the completed interview transcripts, the memory stick on which the interviews were stored, the permission letters, and other salient information pertaining to this study and the participants will be stored in a locked cupboard in the office for a period of five years, after which it will be shredded and burnt.

FINDINGS

The studies engaged six rural ECD/ECCE educators as participants from two centres that are assigned pseudonym-Higher Ground Kiddies and Peace Day Care Centre. This data was generated through reflective activities and an individual semi-structured interview. Findings from the study revealed that most of the participants do not have formal music education or bachelor's degree in early childhood education except for two participants who have experiences from related fields. However, due to their long years of working in the ECD/ECCE centres coupled with their love for children, the rest learn music from different sources such as musical children's YouTube, church, and old colleagues in the field and employ it in the classroom. Four out of the six participants attested that they employ music to teach different themes including communication skills. The other two have difficulty in employing music to teach because they are new in the centre. The results of this study were assembled into four themes: Nature of rural ECD/ECCE educators' training; The ECD/ECCE rural educators' perception of music-based pedagogy; Facilitating communication skills with music; Variety of music employed by the ECD/ECCE Educators.

The Rural ECD/ECCE Educators' Musical Training and Experience

The participants were asked to freely express themselves on their musical expertise and how it was employed to facilitate communication skills in the classroom. From the findings, only two of the participants had acquired minimal musical training from ECD level four from Edu experts and NQF level five training. The rest participants gained their musical experiences from church, the internet, and colleagues.

Below are their responses:

This is the first participant, and the only one with sound musical skills. She uses a variety of music in the classroom including the teaching of communication skills. She also supported the newly employed educators with some elementary musical training. She stated:

I received some musical training during my NQF level 5 training. We are taught sound, pitch, and learning of some musical instruments. Music is the best implementation strategy suitable for learners. I also make some personal attempts by listening to children's songs and watching children's YouTube.

⁴⁵ Johanna Hall, Mark Gaved, and Julia Sargent, "Participatory Research Approaches in Times of Covid-19: A Narrative Literature Review," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20 (January 1, 2021),1: 160940692110100, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211010087>.

⁴⁶ Matthew B Miles and A Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (sage, 1994).

But I think I can do better with more information and training (A female ECD/ECCE educator with 17years experience and 49 years old)

The second participant also has musical experiences through a short musical training:

I think I have experience in music, I did ECD level 4 with Edu experts where I did a module in music. The training exposed me to a variety of music that one can employ in the ECD classroom. (40 year-old female ECCE educator with 15 years of work experience).

This participant is newly employed and has received some informal musical training from the principal.

I do not have any formal training in music, and I'm newly employed. The little knowledge of music I use in the class is gotten from the principal. She gave us general training including the relevant music for the ECD classroom. I also listen to children's music online to upgrade myself (A female ECCE educator with 2 months of teaching experience and is 28 years old).

The next participant has no formal training in music, but with ECD experiences, she could conveniently employ music to teach any skill to the children.

No, I do not go to school to learn music, but I have been teaching now for the past six years. I have ECD experience and could use music in the classroom, I'm also a church person where we learned many songs and as a mother and grandmother, I sing for my children and grandchildren (A female ECCE educator with 6years of experience and is 55 years old)

One of the educators stated that:

The only musical training I received was from my principal when I was newly recruited. I stopped my education in grade 11, and I'm still learning and willing to learn more about music because we use songs and rhymes to teach virtually all the subjects. I need more music training. I love children and I want to give my best (A female educator with one year of teaching experience at the ECCE centre and is 28yrs).

Under this theme, most of the educators lack formal musical training or very minimal.

Below is the response of this participant:

For formal musical training no, but the unit standard 24485 contains a little of how to make music activities. And for me, I have a natural sense of musical ideas to help children learn any subject. I think we do not read too much about music education to use it in the classroom (A female educator with seven years of teaching experience and is 32 years old).

The responses of the participants show that the majority do not have formal musical training. Only two of them have formal musical experiences. Hence, they all requested musical empowerment to enable them to give their best to the learners.

The Rural ECD/ECCE educators' perception of music-based pedagogy for teaching communication to the Children

The participants gave their views on their perception of music-based pedagogy and its effect in accelerating the children's acquisition of communication skills. All the participants agreed that music, stories, play way method, and rhymes are the best teaching strategies for ECD/ECCE classrooms. Below are some of their direct responses:

These are children and the best way to teach them, is by using songs. They learn any skill or subject with ease when we use songs. The use of songs for these children even supports their emotional, mental, and physical development. Whenever you sing in any subject, the children go with the rhythm hence, they learn faster. Music is the best teaching method (A female ECCE educator with 15 years of experience and is 40years old)

Another participant added that:

The use of music helps to develop the children's listening skills. When you teach using music, the children's attention is arrested. I will say music suits the nature of children, I use different music in my class, but I need more training in music especially how to use it to teach communication (A female ECCE Educators with 6 years of experience and is 55 years old).

The next participant also agreed on music-based pedagogy. Here is her response:

Rote learning is not for ECD/ECCE classes, especially the children in the rural context. While the children in the urban, setting watch different music programs on television, these here do not. I think we; their educators must try to bring those rhymes and songs to the class to help them learn. I know that music is best for them and have been using it in my class (A female ECD/ECCE educator with 17 years of experience and 49 years old).

The findings of this study showed that the Rural ECD/ECCE educators understood that employing various songs to teach is the best for the children. They agreed that the use of songs aids in the facilitation of the acquisition of any skills. However, they need musical empowerment to efficiently employ music-based pedagogy.

The Rural ECD/ ECCE Facilitating Communication Skills with Music

Furthermore, the research delved into the focal point which is using music to teach communication skills in their classroom knowing that most of the children in the centres are vulnerable. The centres use National Curriculum Framework, and they stick to the learning areas stipulated in the document including the teaching of communication skills to the children.

The first participant attested that:

I teach communication on a daily routine, introducing sound teaching through stories and songs to learn new word structure and sentences. I also use music to teach picture reading for a deeper understanding of concepts. Communication is very important for children's development. We do a whole of child development with songs (A female ECD/ECCE educator with 17 years of experience and 49 years old).

Similarly, this participant confirmed that communication is taught to the learners.

I teach communication skills to the children. I teach them to recognize letters, listen, talk, and respond to questions. I usually use roleplay and songs to teach all these. There is a guide that makes the activities easy to teach (A female ECCE educator with 15 years of experience and is 40 years old).

The response of another participant:

I follow ELDAS in the NCF curriculum. I teach emergent literacy, how to speak, talk, and daily conversation, I also use songs for alphabet two letter words, sound, and pitch (A female educator with seven years of teaching experience and is 32 years old).

The next participants said:

Communication is a daily routine, I employ stories, rhymes, and different songs to support the children to get the skills. I used the songs I was taught by my principal, although I still need further training, still struggling with some areas (A female ECCE educator with 2 months of teaching experience and is 28 years old).

Variety of Music Employed by the Rural ECD/ECCE Educators to Teach Communication Skills.

The educators mentioned different songs and rhymes they employed in engaging with the children on various themes including communication skills. They stated that the children were supported with language development by using rhymes and songs for the repetition of words.

The participant stated that:

I use different songs from the internet to teach the development of new words, gross motor movement, and learning words relating to body parts. I use songs such as Hokey Pokey, Head, Shoulder, Knees, and Toes. I also use songs to teach emotional stability, songs as "You Are Happy and You Know". (A female ECD/ECCE educator with 17 years of experience and 49 years old).

The next participants also agreed that she uses songs in the classroom:

As for me, I use different songs that suit what the children will be learning that very week. I can compose simple songs to teach them listening skills, two-letter words, or words for daily communication. For example, there are Bingo songs to teach children letter awareness, I also use a few instruments that we have such as improvised drums and clapper. (A female educator with seven years of teaching experience and is 32 years old).

For this participant, she listens to some songs on the internet and uses them during the communication lesson period. She stated:

You know I don't have any music training, so I listen to a series of children's songs on television and select the relevant ones for communication skills. I use songs such as A, B.C. songs, and Old MacDonald Had a Farm to teach children sounds. I also use the "Wheels on The Bus" for sounds such as 'beep' and 'up' (A female educator with one year of teaching experience at the ECCE centre and is 28yrs).

Virtually all the participants use music in the classroom to teach the different themes including communication. The result shows that they employed a variety of music to teach the children daily routine words, alphabets, sounds, and body parts and strengthen their emotions. Those without musical training empowered themselves by listening to online children's songs. To some extent, these participants support the notion of music-based pedagogy, and they are using it in their individual classrooms. However, they seek help and further training to enhance their effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

Nearly all South African teacher training institutions offer creative arts as part of the curriculum for pre-service students of which music is one of the units. Hence, pre-service teachers who pass through university are given the rudiment of music. Communication and language skills in early childhood are viewed to be the foundation for the further development of a child in every other area of life and it can only occur and have an impact on the children when it is clearly and explicitly conveyed. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to explore the rural ECD/ECCE educators' perception of employing music and rhymes to support vulnerable children from low economic contexts to acquire communication skills. Six rural ECD/ECCE educators were engaged to share their experiences.

Theme: 1 The Rural ECD/ECCE Educators Musical Training and Experience

The data from this study shows that none of the Rural ECD/ECCE educators from the research context obtained a university degree in Early childhood development. The highest musically educated among them obtained the NQF level 5 training, while the next to her has Unit standard 24485 qualification where she receives basic knowledge in music. The remaining four are without formal musical experiences. This information is supported by Zulu, Aina, and Bipath, who reported that there is a wide gap between the ECCE education and training of the rural ECCE educators and the Urban educators.⁴⁷ Most of the rural ECCE/ECD educators do not have sufficient musical training.

However, the rest of the educators gave themselves various informal training, two of them attended a musical workshop organized by the principal of one of the centres. One resorted to online children's rhymes and music sites where she listens to different music for different activities, she added that as an educator she must acquire enough knowledge to enable him to support the children and play her role as a teacher. This result is in congruence with Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory which discloses that learning, acquisition of knowledge, and skills occur when the learner interacts with a knowledgeable and efficient educator which he named the More Knowledgeable Order (MKO).⁴⁸

The finding also shows that the Rural educators in this research do not have efficient formal music training, they were passionate about trying to learn basic musical skills from the internet to support the impact of communication skills on learners. They also claimed that they learned music from the church and family. The remaining two have been in the centres for some years now, hence they know some ECD songs for different activities.

However, virtually all the participants do not possess Early Childhood Development teaching qualifications. The highest qualified among them only received the entry level qualification which is NQF level 5 training. This result was corroborated by the researcher's previous research by Arasomwan and Mashiya, as well as by Atmore, Van Niekerk, and Ashley-Cooper.⁴⁹ Many ECD/ECCE educators do not receive sufficient

⁴⁷ Zulu, Aina, and Bipath, "Education and Training Experiences of Early Childhood Care and Education Practitioners in Rural and Urban Settings of Durban, South Africa."

⁴⁸ Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, *The Collected Works of LS Vygotsky: Problems of the Theory and History of Psychology*, vol. 3 (Springer Science & Business Media, 1987).

⁴⁹ Arasomwan and Mashiya, "Early Childhood Care and Education Educators' Understanding of the Use of Music-Based Pedagogies to Teach Communication Skills"; Eric Atmore, L.J. Van Niekerk, and M. Ashley-Cooper, "Challenges Facing the Early Childhood Development Sector in South Africa," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 2, no. 1 (July 1, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v2i1.25>.

and efficient music training required to promote music-based pedagogy in the classroom. The participants all demanded musical training and empowerment for productivity in using music-based pedagogy.

Theme: 2 The Rural ECD/ECCE Educators' Perception of Music-based Pedagogy for Teaching Communication to the Children

The data from this theme revealed that the Rural ECD/ECCE educators of this study all agreed that music-based pedagogy is the best implementation strategy that supports children's effective acquisition of all desirable skills including communication. They declared that music is employed to calm the children's emotions and arouse their interest in learning in the class. Most of the participants have made personal efforts to acquire some level of musical knowledge by watching children's music on YouTube. The experienced ones among them support the newly employed and solicit help from music experts for some basic musical training. They understand the nature of children and that the best developmentally appropriate teaching strategies are music, rhymes, stories, and play way method. The previous research conducted in the urban context of KwaZulu-Natal supported this claim, that most ECCE educators recognized music-based pedagogy as best in supporting children in acquiring communication skills.⁵⁰

Theme: 3 The Rural ECD/ ECCE Facilitation of Communication Skills with Music

Acquisition of Communication skills is pivotal to children's all-inclusive development. The Star has reported that about 16,400 foundation phase learners who participated in a national assessment could not read for meaning.⁵¹ Hence the NCF encourages the ECCE educators and caregivers to support the children through sounds and words", "sound games", "rhythm and pitch", and "songs and rhymes" to acquire communication skills. The study explored six rural ECD/ECCE educators from two centres to share their perspectives on supporting learners with communication skills by employing music-based pedagogy. The finding revealed that the two centres strictly adhered to the NCF document by teaching children communication skills daily. This information refuted the report in a previous study by Arasomwan and Mashiya where the participants said the ECCE children are too young to learn communication skills.⁵² The finding further discloses that the participants use rhymes and songs to teach the children speech development and language of daily routine.

Theme: 4 Variety of Music Employed by the Rural ECD/ECCE Educators to Teach Communication Skills.

A variety of songs were employed by the participants of this study and, they all attested that using songs to teach the children aroused their interest in learning many skills including communication skills. The educators shared their views on the various songs they often used in the classroom. These include 'Hokey Pokey, to teach body parts 'Head, Shoulder, Knees, and Toes; "If you are happy and you know" to teach the children emotional stability. This is the way we wash our face, and this is the way we get dressed' to teach language for daily routine. Others are alphabets songs; Bingo songs and Old MacDonald had a farm to teach children sounds. Others include "Stop, Look and Listen", which is used to teach them safety when helping them to cross the road'. The information provided by the participant is in congruence with Bolduc and Evrard,⁵³ as well as Cawley who postulate that adopting developmentally appropriate activities such as bouncing, tickling, wiggling singing in the ECD/ECCE classroom aids the children's language development.⁵⁴ The findings show that the participants acknowledged music as the best to help children learn and have been using some of it in their classrooms.

However, only a few with basic knowledge of music could effectively and widely use it in the classroom. Hence, the participants are soliciting for musical training on their own to enable them to confidently employ music-based pedagogy.

⁵⁰ Arasomwan and Mashiy, "Early Childhood Care and Education Educators' Understanding of the Use of Music-Based Pedagogies to Teach Communication Skills."

⁵¹ The Star, "More than 70% Pupils in Foundation Phase Have Poor Reading Skills," <https://www.iol.co.za/the-star/news/more-than-70-of-pupils-in-foundation-phase-have-poor-reading-skills-study-2982ce0a-4e34-428o2-91c4-58f8c92dfc90>, 2020.

⁵² Arasomwan and Mashiy, "Early Childhood Care and Education Educators' Understanding of the Use of Music-Based Pedagogies to Teach Communication Skills."

⁵³ Bolduc and Evrard, "Music Education from Birth to Five: An Examination of Early Childhood Educators' Music Teaching Practices."

⁵⁴ Cawley, "The Musical Enculturation of Irish Traditional Musicians: An Ethnographic Study of Learning Processes."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has established that using songs, rhymes, and appropriate developmental teaching strategies is best to facilitate and support the ECD/ECCE learners to acquire communication skills. The participants confirmed that using music calms the learners' emotions, accelerating sustainable learning. The ECD/ECCE curriculum developer and policymakers are urged to accord music subjects a significant place to support vulnerable children to learn. Music should be incorporated as an independent subject in the CAPS and in the NCF documents because most of the centers in the rural context (this study context inclusive) combine children aged four and five in the same classroom. Also, ECD/ECCE policymakers could collaborate with the teacher training institution to support the ECCE/ECD educators with a professional development intervention program to help upgrade them with rudiment of musical knowledge.

This result was from a sample of only six ECD/ECCE educators from two rural centres because it is a qualitative case study. Hence, there is a need for elaborate research on a wider population still from rural settings. Also, research is needed to empower the Rural ECD/ECCE educator with developmentally appropriate musical skills to support their effective employing of music-based pedagogy. Furthermore, there is a need for a study on their constraints in employing music-based pedagogy in the ECD/ECCE classroom. Additionally, research must be conducted on ECD/ECCE developmental facilities. The two centres of this study are understaffed hence they use a teacher for ages four and five in a class. The subsequent studies might focus on questions such as: How does the use of music-based pedagogy aid children from low economic status language development? Why do the rural ECD/ECCE educators need musical empowerment? What are the limitations or constraints of rural ECD/ECCE educators in using music-based pedagogy in the classroom? Tackling these questions could help to strengthen and equip the rural ECD/ECCE Educators with the needed skills for their effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study has established that music-based pedagogy is best for supporting children to acquire communication skills especially vulnerable ones from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants of this study attested that employing a variety of songs in the classroom aids and facilitates the children's sustainable learning. The finding further revealed that the rural ECD/ECCE songs teach the children desirable skills including communication skills. However, they are not efficiently equipped with qualifications for ECD/ECCE classrooms, especially music training.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Arasomwan Deborah holds Ph.D., M.Ed., and B.Ed. Honours, and B.Ed. certificates in Education. She received her Ph.D in Early Childhood Education from the prestigious University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in 2021. She has been engaged in teaching (different Education modules) and research activities in institutions of higher learning for about 7 years, especially in the discipline of Foundation phase/Early Childhood Development and Curriculum. Arasomwan Deborah is currently a postdoctoral research fellow and lecturer in the School of Education at Sol Plaatje University Kimberley South Africa. Before joining Sol Plaatje University, she was an ad hoc lecturer at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal in the School of Education. Her research centres around three goals: (1) Conducting an action participating research to empower the ECCE educator practically with rudiment of music to use music-based pedagogy in ECCE classrooms (2) Investigating challenges of foundation phase lecturers in conducting digital formative assessment and (3) Investigating students' view on virtual learning. She also engages in Community development programmes such as empowering the Foundation Phase rural first-year students with effective reading skills and empowering the Rural ECD educators with rudiment of music to aid their productivity in teaching activities.

Glynnis Daries (Ph.D.) is a senior lecturer in Foundation Phase Teaching at Sol Plaatje University. She is the acting Head of Department in Education Studies. In a career that spans over 14 years, she has played the role of a teacher, facilitator, manager, academic, researcher, mentor, and advocate for the early years. She completed her Ph.D. in early childhood care and education in January 2017 at the University of the Free State. Her Ph.D. focused on the 'funds of knowledge' of practitioners and young children at community and privately owned early years centres. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of the sources of knowledge and the daily practise of practitioners with very young children. She contributed to new thinking about the professionalism of early childhood practitioners. She is currently part of two inter-university research projects that focus on Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The first project focusses on how teachers, principals, parents, university lecturers, and Department of Education subject advisors work successfully as a Community of Practise (CoP) to stimulate change for Foundation Phase learners and parents. The Family Maths project incorporates the use of mother tongue instruction and the manipulation of concrete Teaching and Learning aids to develop mathematical knowledge and skills in Foundation Phase. Parental involvement, homework support and, the use of concrete manipulatives is emphasised. The second research project in ECCE centres is designed around a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) approach to family and community involvement. Different community stakeholders and participants come together and use hands-on activities to promote the perceptual development and emergent numeracy skills of young children in early childhood centres. The aim is to work with participants in ways which will sustain contextually relevant and age-appropriate early education amongst practitioners, children, and parents.