

Music and Rhymes as Mechanisms for ECCE Learners' Socio-emotional Intelligence Development



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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, psychosocial problems resulting from child-headed families, orphaned children, violent homes, neglected children, and single parents have considerably grown. These problems including absenteeism, depression, adolescent pregnancy, and suicide can be prevented by teaching children socio-emotional skills, which are the information, abilities, and attitudes needed to identify and control emotions, set and achieve constructive objectives, empathy for others, and maintaining wholesome social connections. Several studies have examined the impact of songs on young children in both European and African contexts. This study thus examined how Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) educators utilize musical pedagogies to enhance students' socio-emotional skills. Through a qualitative case study involving interviews and observations of MKOs (More Knowledgeable Others), the research explored the educators' engagement with learners and the use of music in supporting socio-emotional development. Six ECCE educators were selected through purposive sampling, conducting interviews, and analyzing data using thematic analysis techniques. The findings confirm that music and rhymes are effective implementation techniques to support young children's socio-emotional development, particularly those from rural contexts. The findings have demonstrated that music-based instruction improves ECCE learners' development of these abilities. Practical implications have been provided for ECCE educators and policymakers, highlighting the importance of incorporating music and rhymes into the ECCE curriculum to support socio-emotional development. Future research can explore the impact of music on children's socio-emotional development in different contexts and investigate the effectiveness of music-based interventions in supporting children's all-around development.

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Publication History

Received:
24th September, 2024
Accepted:
12th December, 2024
Published online:
3rd February, 2025

Keywords: *songs and rhymes, rural context, socio-emotional, Early Childhood Care and Education*

INTRODUCTION

Wellbeing, which includes socio-emotional ability is one of the Early Learning and Development Areas (ELDAs) designed to be imparted to Early Childhood Care and Education Learners.¹ The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) document describes the importance of well-being as the skills that empower young children with resilience to live and cope with life. The holistic development of a child as in forming emotional regulation, physical ability, social cognition, and mental skills commence at the ECCE stage. However, many children from disadvantaged backgrounds are devoid of all these

¹ Department of Basic Education (DBE), *The South African National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four* (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2015).

developmental potentials due to the absence of appropriate stimuli in the context.² Similarly, Sheridan, et.al. added that the absence of psychosocial skills in the early years alters brain development that results in the deprivation of social, emotional, and behavioral development.³ Thus, employing age-appropriate developmental music and rhymes in ECCE classrooms is efficient in empowering young children with these vital skills, and thereby closing the gaps.⁴

Over the years, research has been conducted nationally and globally advocating for music education across all educational levels due to its numerous potentials. The study of music fosters the development of abilities such as stress management, self-discovery, social bonding, values, and ethics; the upholding of social mores and norms; social critique and the public's conscience; spirituality; and compassionate living.⁵ However, there is a shortage of research examining the use of Music and rhymes to support the emotional cognition and social development of ECCE learners, particularly in South Africa. This is concerning because, should they not be effectively taught from early childhood, these fundamental abilities may play a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes of ECCE learners during their adolescence and beyond. This might make it more difficult to achieve the NCF document's aim of making well-being one of the six ELDAs.

Consequently, this study examines the use of music and rhymes by six ECCE educators in two ECD centers to support the ECCE learners' acquisition of Social-emotional skills. The objectives are twofold: to examine how the educators are using music and rhyme in the ECCE to support the learners' social-emotional development and the effect of music in aiding the social-emotional development of the learners. The primary research question that informed this study is:

- How do the Rural ECCE educators use music and rhymes to support the socio-emotional development of ECCE learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Social-Emotional Development of ECCE Learners

Many young adults struggle with innumerable social and emotional issues such as impulsivity, disobedience, and aggressiveness that interfere with their academic performance and everyday functioning.⁶ These anti-social behaviors can cause irritation, anxiety, and exhaustion, and teachers are finding that more and more pupils are displaying them thus, socio-emotional development in early years using age-appropriate strategies is indispensable.⁷ Social and emotional learning, or SEL, is the process by which people acquire and use a set of social skills, emotional, and related nonacademic skills, attitudes, behaviors, and values that help direct their thoughts, feelings, and actions in ways that enable them to succeed in school, work, and life.⁸ In Zhang and Adegbola's opinion, socio-emotional skills, such as Self-knowledge: the ability to identify and communicate one's emotions, including one's values, preferences, and dislikes; Self-control: the ability to regulate one's feelings and stress, such as refraining from violence

² Mafruha Alam et al., "Parenting App to Support Socio-Emotional and Cognitive Development in Early Childhood: Iterative Codesign Learnings from Nine Low-Income and Middle-Income Countries," *BMJ Open* 13, no. 5 (2023): e071232.

³ Margaret A Sheridan et al., "Early Deprivation Alters Structural Brain Development from Middle Childhood to Adolescence," *Science Advances* 8, no. 40 (2022): eabn4316.

⁴ Avosuahi Deborah Arasomwan and Glynnis Daries, "Rural Early Childhood Educators' Perception of Music-Based Pedagogy in Teaching Communication Skills to Children," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 12 (January 20, 2024): 254–68, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202341222>.

⁵ Benjamin Adjepong, "The Value and Importance of Music to Children's Growth and Development," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 25, no. 4 (2020): 1–9; Graça Boal-Palheiros and Beatriz Ilari, "Music, Drama, and Social Development in Portuguese Children," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023): 1093832; Fengjiao Zhang and Mansor Bin Abu Talib, "Orff-Based Music Education: A Systematic Review of Its Effects on Social Emotional Competence in Primary School Students," *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 29, no. 4 (2023); Melinda Sue Mertz, "The Influences of Music on the Confidence and Sense of Belonging of Children," 2023; Arasomwan and Daries, "Rural Early Childhood Educators' Perception of Music-Based Pedagogy in Teaching Communication Skills to Children."

⁶ Judit Váradi, "A Review of the Literature on the Relationship of Music Education to the Development of Socio-Emotional Learning," *Sage Open* 12, no. 1 (2022): 21582440211068500.

⁷ Darcy L Logan, "Social-Emotional Learning in Early Childhood," 2024; Ma Lovena Veladiez Moneva and Czarecah Tuppil Oropilla, "Literature-Based Program," *Lifelong Learning: Education for the Future World*, 2024, 113.

⁸ Katharine E Brush et al., "Social and Emotional Learning: From Conceptualization to Practical Application in a Global Context," *Life Skills Education for Youth: Critical Perspectives*, 2022, 43–71.

when upset with students in the classroom; Self-motivation; comprehending the emotions of others and the capacity to resolve personal and interpersonal issues are vital for 21st-century citizens.⁹

In Hernandez Gonzalez's definition, socio-emotional development is the process of acquiring lifelong skills like accountability, stewardship, and connection through place-based education (PBE).¹⁰ The author went on to say that pedagogies like experiential learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and community involvement empower students with socio-emotional skills by fostering a sense of place and all of its affordances and the natural, cultural, and historical aspects.

Importance of early development of children's social-emotional skills of ECCE learners

The term social-emotional development describes the developmental stages that young children go through as they learn to comprehend, express, and regulate their feelings as well as their social interactions.¹¹ This age group of kids is known for its quick mood swings, intense possessiveness, and hard time sharing. Children must possess socio-emotional competence (SEC) to grasp and gain from social interactions with peers and adults, whether at home or school. SEC enables children to suppress impulsive behavioral reactions, acknowledge and control emotions, effectively understand the perspectives of others, accurately identify problems, and create goals and solutions for constructive problem-solving.¹²

Additionally, the body of research showing the beneficial correlations between socioemotional skills and academic success is increasing. Portela-Pino, Alvariñas-Villaverde, and Pino-Juste state that academic success is often interpreted as learners' accomplishments in constructing new information and that early acquisition of socio-economic skills facilitates their academic performance.¹³ Furthermore, early socio-emotional competence is linked to the lack of school anxiety, self-regulation at school, and self-perceived competence at school in addition to grade success.¹⁴ Dowling, Simpkin, and Barry in their quantitative research posit that factors such as school dropouts, hyperactivity in the classroom, and lower academic performance are associated with poor well-being, and that the SEL interventions that are implemented with age-appropriate pedagogy are a necessity.¹⁵ Academic achievement is significantly impacted by social-emotional learning (SEL). Pillay added that students are better able to control their emotions, form wholesome connections, and make responsible judgments when they have developed their social-emotional skills.¹⁶ This therefore has a favourable effect on their academic achievement. Learning talents and skills are improved and cognitive growth is promoted through social-emotional learning.

Music and Rhymes that Enhance Social-Emotional Development of ECCE Learners

Music is a unique, ephemeral, symbolic, and creative medium of communication that anybody may use. It operates at the preverbal level compared to some other SEL techniques and the use of music could be a more interesting and approachable option for teaching SEL in the ECCE classroom.¹⁷ Besides, learners in an early childhood education setting have difficulty naming and expressing their feelings as well as those of others. Lacking the vocabulary to articulate their emotions or the skills to interact and solve

⁹ Weiwu Zhang and Oluseyi Adegbola, "Emotional Intelligence and Public Relations: An Empirical Review," *Public Relations Review* 48, no. 3 (September 2022): 102199, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102199>.

¹⁰ Felicity Hernandez Gonzalez, "Exploring the Affordances of Place-Based Education for Advancing Sustainability Education: The Role of Cognitive, Socio-Emotional and Behavioural Learning," *Education Sciences* 13, no. 7 (2023): 676.

¹¹ Herbert Scheithauer et al., "Developmentally Appropriate Prevention of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, Social-Emotional Learning, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice for Early Childhood Education and Care: The Papilio-3to6 Program," *International Journal of Developmental Science* 16, no. 3–4 (January 31, 2023): 81–97, <https://doi.org/10.3233/DEV-220331>.

¹² Abdul Qayyum et al., "Enhancing Social-Emotional Skills in Early Childhood Education-A Comparative Analysis," *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)* 10, no. 2 (2024): 159–75.

¹³ Iago Portela-Pino, Myriam Alvariñas-Villaverde, and Margarita Pino-Juste, "Socio-Emotional Skills as Predictors of Performance of Students: Differences by Gender," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (2021): 4807.

¹⁴ Nathalie Mella et al., "Socio-Emotional Competencies and School Performance in Adolescence: What Role for School Adjustment?," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 640661.

¹⁵ Katherine Dowling, Andrew J. Simpkin, and Margaret M. Barry, "A Cluster Randomized-Controlled Trial of the MindOut Social and Emotional Learning Program for Disadvantaged Post-Primary School Students," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48, no. 7 (July 19, 2019): 1245–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00987-3>.

¹⁶ Jace Pillay, "Psychological, Social, and Physical Ecologies for Child Resilience: A South African Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023): 1190297.

¹⁷ Kathryn Coolidge, "The Use of Music Therapy in the Development of Socio-Emotional Skills in Children: A Literature Review," 2022.

problems, makes them become irate and act out of anger by hitting or sobbing. The ability to communicate emotions via using music to impact children's mental health, well-being, and academic performance is essential. Children learn to identify their own emotions when songs are utilized as a pedagogical tool in school, thereby allowing them to better comprehend the emotions of others.¹⁸ Findings from previous research studies have also established that using music to teach any skill helps learners gain a quick understanding, makes the classroom atmosphere a positive environment for learning, and promotes socio-emotional skills among them, thereby aiding their growth and development.¹⁹ Dsupin, further confirmed that when young children participate in musical activities they develop the skills for socialization, self-confidence, social networking, a sense of accomplishment, teamwork, mutual support, and tolerance, which all promote healthy and harmonious living in the society.²⁰

Music and rhymes allow children to release emotions that are not always easily expressed through the words they know.²¹ The author added that listening, singing, playing, and dancing to music can lift or soothe the spirit, bring peace after moments of emotional turmoil, and reduce stress and anxiety, making children's learning more efficient. Additionally, youngsters who collaborate to create music learn how to control their emotions and become more sensitive to the sentiments of others.²² Moreover, building a sense of community in the classroom may be facilitated by children and their families sharing and exchanging songs and musical experiences.

There are many songs for the socio-emotional development of children. These include:

- 'If You Are Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands'
- 'Be a Friend, be a Friend, be a Friend, this is a Bullyfree Zone,
- 'Don't Be a Bully'
- 'Give a Smile and not sadness'

These songs aid the children's development of strong self-regulation abilities, an extended attention span, and direction following in the ECCE classroom. Another interesting song to teach children how to manage their emotions is 'If You're Angry and You Know It' by Jack Hartmann'. The educator sings and leads the children to demonstrate the words of the song such as If you're angry and you know it, blow it out; If you're angry and you know it walk away; If you're angry and you know it, tell someone, "I feel angry!"

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was grounded on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). The sociocultural theory emphasizes that the most important aspect of our psychological development is social contact and the involvement of people. The sociocultural theory holds that human learning mostly comes from human interactions with other people and the impact of those who are recognized as more knowledgeable and reliable role models. The three main themes of Vygotsky's SCT are social interaction, the more knowledgeable other (MKO), and the zone of proximal development. From Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, effective learning of socio-emotional skills is embedded in the constructive interaction between educators and learners, and children develop skills when an adult, such as an educator, caregiver, or parent, provides reinforcement and stimulation.

¹⁸ Jinyoung Kim, "Transforming Music Education for the next Generation: Planting 'Four Cs' through Children's Songs," *International Journal of Early Childhood* 49, no. 2 (2017): 181–93.

¹⁹ 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 (2021): 1–12; Arasomwan and Daries, "Rural Early Childhood Educators' Perception of Music-Based Pedagogy in Teaching Communication Skills to Children."

²⁰ Borbála Dsupin, "Personality Development In Early Childhood Through Music Education," *Különleges Bánásmód-Interdiszciplináris Folyóirat* 9, no. 1 (2023): 189–96.

²¹ Hannah Percival, "Can You Hear the Connection? A Study on Musical-Social Bonding" (2021).

²² Trinh Nguyen et al., "Early Social Communication through Music: State of the Art and Future Perspectives," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience* 63 (2023): 101279.

According to Vygotsky, a person's entire environment shapes them, and every system in a child's immediate surroundings has to provide support to foster the child's socioemotional development.²³ Along with Bronfenbrenner and Piaget, the MKO of Vygotsky's SCT refers to somebody who has a better understanding, and socio-emotional intelligence and can employ age-appropriate strategies to empower the learners with such skills. It is anticipated that the ECCE teachers participating in this study will be trained in the notion of music and will learn how to effectively use it as pedagogy to teach children the socio-emotional skills or well-being, which is one of the ELDA in the NCF curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

To understand how ECCE educators engaged with their students and how they used musical pedagogies to scaffold their degrees of socio-emotional skills, a qualitative case study that involved interviewing and observing the MKOs was employed. Six ECCE educators were chosen using a purposive sample technique, taking into account their background, number of years spent instructing in ECCE, and willingness to take part in the study. This was done following visits to the research centres to build friendly ties with the educators.

Thus, the selection of the educators with needed information is necessary to provide answers to the key research questions. This sampling method is in line with Teddlie and Yu's argument on the purposive sampling method in research as they posit that it involves deciding on people, groups of people, or schools that have rich knowledge about the subject under research.²⁴ While acknowledging the potential for sampling bias, the research justifies the use of purposive sampling by emphasizing the importance of selecting educators with rich knowledge and experience in using musical pedagogies. By intentionally choosing participants who can provide valuable insights into the research questions, the study aims to ensure depth and richness in the data collected. The focus on qualitative exploration and in-depth understanding of educators' practices outweighs potential concerns about generalizability, as the aim is to provide detailed insights rather than broad generalizations. Data was gathered through semi-structured, open-ended interviews with six ECCE educators who had 4-18 years of teaching experience in the ECCE phase. The purpose of the interviews was to explore their understanding and knowledge of using music and rhymes to support the children's socio-emotional development.

Two rural ECCE/ECD facilities in Kimberley, South Africa, served as the study's sites. A government is one thing, and a non-governmental organization is another. Both include some basic amenities, including beds and mattresses for kids aged 0 to 4, tap water, electricity, and a well-equipped playground. The two centres merge kids aged four and five in a single classroom due to a lack of staff resources. They gave the kids instruction on CAPS and NCF paperwork. The participants worked together to perform the study. Miles and Huberman's approach to deductive and inductive reasoning was utilized to analyze the data on a thematic level.²⁵ The research's use of Miles and Huberman's approach to analyzing data at a thematic level highlights a structured and systematic analytical process. This study integrates deductive and inductive reasoning, to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the educators' perspectives on using music for socio-emotional development. Transparency in reporting the data analysis methods and findings enhances the credibility of the research and underscores the reliability of the study's conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

According to Harriss, Jones, and MacSween, ethical norms are essential principles that protect the security, welfare, and respect of all current and potential study participants.²⁶ Thus, the research explicitly states its adherence to ethical norms and principles to protect participants' security, welfare, and respect throughout the study. By ensuring participant autonomy, promoting non-maleficence, and upholding beneficence, the study prioritizes the well-being and rights of the educators involved. Several procedures

²³ Karim Shabani, "Implications of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory for Second Language (L2) Assessment," *Cogent Education* 3, no. 1 (December 31, 2016): 1242459, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1242459>.

²⁴ Charles Teddlie and Fen Yu, "Mixed Methods Sampling: A Typology with Examples," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1, no. 1 (2007): 77–100.

²⁵ M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (California: Sage, 1994).

²⁶ D J Harriss, C Jones, and Alasdair MacSween, "Ethical Standards in Sport and Exercise Science Research: 2022 Update," *International Journal of Sports Medicine* 43, no. 13 (2022): 1065–70.

and considerations were used to guarantee that this qualitative investigation's appropriate processes were followed and adhered to. Thus, gatekeeper approval was acquired from the school principals of each research project. The researcher also paid initial visits to the participants to build rapport and inform them about the goal of the research being conducted. A consent form was also given to the participants to read and append their signatures before engaging them in the research.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings are organized into three main themes, that emerged from the thematic analysis of the data from the semi-structured interviews and reflective writing. For the data presentation, and the discussion of the results that follow, and to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants, they were assigned codes. These themes are 1) ECCE educators' understanding of Socio-emotional intelligence 2) ECCE educators' using music to impart learners with socio-emotional skills and 3) the different musical rhymes used to impart socio-emotional intelligence to learners and the impart.

Theme1: Rural ECCE educators' understanding of the Socio-emotional intelligence of ECCE learners

The responses of the educators on their understanding of the socio-emotional development of learners were based on their educational experiences, the number of years in ECD/ECCE centers, and their exposure to motherhood.

Participant 1 stated below:

I have been teaching in ECD now for more than 17 years. I was young when I started teaching. I have taught children with different emotions and temperaments and learned how to handle them. I am 49 years old and have been with my grandchildren and schoolchildren. I also have some NQF level 5 training on children and their socio-emotional traits (Female ECD/ECCE educator with 17years of experience and 49 years old)

The second participant had a similar experience she stated

I know how to use my imagination, having understood children's nature and characteristics, they can easily throw tantrums become frustrated, and even disturb the class. I'm a mother and grandmother and I know the nature of children from raising my children (A female ECCE educator with 6 years of experience and is 55 years old).

The next participant acquires her understanding of children's socio-emotional status through her engagement within the church children's ministry. She said:

I have been a teacher, in the school's ECCE department for the past five years. Since I've been a teacher in my church's children's department, teaching has always been a part of me. I am aware of the emotional difficulties faced by kids, including when they display distinctive behavioral patterns like impetuous and out-of-turn speech. There are even others who plan to move around and disturb the lesson. I can thus relate to the kids' emotional state (Interview with Participant 3, a female educator with five years of teaching experience in ECD).

The next participant stated that although she had not spent a long time in the center, she knew about children's socio-emotion challenges in her experience of motherhood.

I'm new to the ECCE centre and lack professional music experience. However, as mothers, we've learned how to sing to soothe and entice babies throwing tantrums to sleep. Numerous kids struggle with socioemotional issues like rage, bullying, and exclusion. I know how to handle them (A female ECCE educator with 2 months of teaching experience and is 28 years old).

The findings under the theme show that Rural ECCE educators have a good understanding of ECCE children's socio-emotional status. The preceding replies indicated that the participants knew children's characteristics and developmental phases. Before they became teachers, several had experience interacting with kids in unofficial settings like their church. Some asserted that their experiences as mothers had taught them the fundamentals of children's socio-emotional struggles. Some of them learned

about children's characteristics during their early childhood development teacher training. Thus they understood children's socio-emotional nature.

Theme 2: ECCE educators' using musical rhymes and songs to impart learners with socio-emotional skills

Based on the responses of the educators on their understanding of the socio-emotional challenges of ECCE learners, the researcher went further to investigate the usage of music and rhymes to support the development of the learners' socio-emotional skills. This theme addresses the various musical rhymes, and songs used by the ECCE educators to impart socio-emotional skills to learners. Their answers closely respond to the research question which is: *How do the Rural ECCE educators use musical rhymes and songs as a strategy to support the socio-emotional development of ECCE learners?*

Although there is a wide variety of songs, the replies from the participants indicated that they mostly utilized music that was created to educate children in socio-emotional development. They said that it is not possible to teach learners ages four and five without using songs. They also attested that the best stage to mold their socio-emotional status is at ages four and five. Hence she listens to children's songs on the Internet to prepare for the day's activities.

Participants A describe how she uses music in the classroom:

I use music virtually for all the activities from the beginning to the end of the day. As I have said, I know music and often compose simple songs based on the timetable for that week. I also listen to educative children's songs by Jack Hartmann and others on the internet. It can be challenging to manage newly arrived youngsters and maintain focus since some of them are overly sensitive, possessive, and have trouble getting along with other kids. I thus utilize upbeat music to soothe and quiet them. Songs do, in fact, aid in children's concentration (Female ECD/ECCE educator with 17 years of experience and 49 years old).

The next participant has been in one of the ECD centres for 15 years and is 40 years old. Her response is as follows:

The children need a lot of support and guidance in handling their emotions and controlling their behaviors in the classroom. No matter how unruly and naughty the children may be, as soon as you introduce songs with action such as Smile Pretty Baby, Shake Your Body Plumpy Queen, clap and Dance Little Angel, dance, dance, the Jolly One. I also, do the same at home for my children to control their emotions. I also have a song to discourage children from bullying one another. There is this song that you sing dance and shake your head while the children follow. I do this whenever a child tries to bully another: Say no to bully, no, no, no, no, this know bullying zone, yes, yes, yes, yes (Interview with a female ECD/ECCE educator with 15 years of experience and 40 years old)

Participant 3 got her experience and understanding of children's socio-emotional traits from the short unit standard 24485 training.

We are taught the nature of children and how to support them to learn. For learning to take place they need to be emotionally stable. We use songs to teach them how to relate well with others, we also use some songs to teach them self-confidence and self-regulation. However, I need more help in music training.

The last three participants were new in the center and were struggling with the use of music in their ECCE classroom. This is the response of one of them:

As I previously stated, I do not have formal training in music or ECD, I only attended the workshop organized by the principal for the new teachers. Hence, I'm still struggling to use music to help these children as expected. I need training because many of the children have socio-emotional difficulties and music is the best strategy to employ (interview with a female ECCE educator with 2 months of teaching experience and is 28 years old).

The results of the analysis of the interview responses, as mentioned above, indicate that the ECCE educators in this study's context are aware of the use of music to support the different socio-emotional

traits of the learners, teaching them empathy, self-control, self-assurance, inclusivity, and how to build relationships skills.

Theme 3: Musical rhymes and Songs used to impart socio-emotional skills to learners and their impact on their socio-emotional development.

This theme addresses the several musical rhymes and songs, that ECCE teachers use to teach their students socioeconomic skills. Although there are many different kinds of music, the participants' answers indicated that they mostly used music that was created with training young listeners in mind. It was suggested that to effectively teach children between the ages of four and five, teachers must possess the musical ability to write short songs that correspond with the themes or emotional states that the students exhibit in the classroom.

Participant One received some musical training, she stated that many children come to the school, sad, fearful, upset, and want to separate from others, but she uses some songs to arouse their happiness. Below is her response

As I have said, I have little knowledge of music and often compose simple songs based on what is on the timetable for that week and the socio-emotional skills needed to be impacted or corrected at the moment. I usually start the day with a warm-up song to ignite happiness, especially when some children enter the classroom crying because they do not want to detach from their parents. Songs such as 'Everybody Claps Your Hands and Shakes Your Body, oh, yes, Everybody Claps Your Hands and Shakes Your Body' The teacher can add other parts of the body like shake your buttocks, your legs, head, hands, etc. With this song the emotional atmosphere becomes normal, a similar song is 'If You Are Happy and You Know It Clap Your Hands, Tap Your Feet, Jump Up', etc (Female ECD/ECCE educator with 17 years of experience and 49 years old)

According to the next participant, she uses songs to teach the children relationship skills.

I use music a lot in my class with my children. When I discovered any red flags of socio-emotional development such as rigidity, not wanting to share or take turns with other children, or fear to try what other children are doing, we sing songs that would unite them together and that will build confidence in them. I listen to educative children's songs by Jack Hartmann and others on the internet to have enough songs on building socialization and self-confidence and to help them label their emotions eg 'When I am happy, I smile, and I'm calm', 'If you're angry and you know it, blow it out'

I also composed some simple songs such as 'Hold Someone's Hand, Shake Your Body a bid and Just Say I Love You (yes Do It Again). The children are arranged in a circle while the teacher leads with action and makes the children follow. After some time, you discover that those children who secluded themselves are singing and happy. Songs indeed, help to mold the children's socio-emotional intelligence (A female ECCE educator with 6 years of experience and is 55 years old).

The next participants, although do not have formal training her a love for children and music made them listen to and learn some children's songs on the internet. She stated that:

In my class I use songs to teach the children to be aware of other people's feelings, listening why others speak, and take turns during sports activities. I also use music to teach the value and importance of other tribes. At times I come to the class with improvised instruments made by Zulu or Indian. I will play it alongside simple Zulu or Indian songs that they can all dance to. After that, I will tell them where the instrument originated from and tell them good things about the tribe. This will enable their love to grow for other tribes and cultures.

The participants of this study to some extent use different music to support the development of the learners' socio-emotional skills.

DISCUSSION

In South Africa, most ECCE teachers receive at least some training in music and thus have some level of efficacy in using music-based pedagogies to teach their learners all the basic Early Learning and Development Areas (ELDAs) as stipulated in the NCF document. However, in this study, the participants do not have enough formal teacher training. However, they engage in self-music study on the internet to support the learners learn the demanded skills.

Theme1: Rural ECCE educators' understanding of the Socio-emotional intelligence of ECCE learners

The study's findings showed that ECCE teachers are aware of the socioemotional needs of their learners. According to the results, two of the participants had received NQF level five training and minor training about early childhood from Edu professionals at ECD level four. The remaining individuals learned about children's nature from coworkers, the internet, and their church. They have a good understanding of children's characteristics including their socio-emotional traits. This conclusion is reinforced by Vygotsky's theory that teachers must become MKOs to assist children in learning, as well as Shulman's notion that teachers must possess a solid understanding of the subject matter they plan to teach. However, out of the six participants, only two had minor training in ECD but others resulted in self-help exercises online to familiarize themselves with the nature of their learners to give their best. This finding is in congruence with researchers that posit that the nature and features of children between the ages of four and five necessitate that their teachers have a thorough awareness of these attributes and can use integrated teaching strategies that are appropriate for their developmental stage to help the kids acquire the skills they want.²⁷

Theme 2: ECCE educators' using musical rhymes and songs to impart learners with socio-emotional skills

This theme discusses the findings on the participant's understanding of the use of music to support the development of ECCE learners' socio-emotional skills. The findings revealed a correlation between their formal ECD training, years of experience, and their expertise in using rhymes and songs to teach learners socio-emotional skills. Out of the six participants, two could successfully support the learners' socio-emotional development with music and rhymes due to their formal training in ECD. This finding was supported by Siskind, et.al., who said that skilled and qualified ECD teachers are effective in imparting learners with desirable abilities.²⁸

The other two were experienced because of their long year at the centers and the last two were new and could not employ rhymes and songs to support the ECCE learners acquire socio-emotional skills. Although, they have a good understanding of the children's socio-emotional challenges. These findings were in line with Ngumbi, research on the 'Challenges Facing Early Childhood Teachers and Possible Solutions'. He mentioned that many of the ECD/ECCE centers employ just those who are good in the center instead of employing skillful and great.²⁹ Various scholars have stated that insufficient music education in schools hinders teachers' ability to incorporate music into the classroom effectively.³⁰

Theme 3: Musical rhymes and Songs used to impart socio-emotional skills to learners and their impact on their socio-emotional development.

The findings under this theme revealed different songs employed by the educator to teach some vital emotional traits such as helping children understand, express, and label their emotions; songs and rhymes to teach self-confidence and self-regulation; songs to support their understanding of inclusivity, how to

²⁷ Joana Cadima et al., "Literature Review on Early Childhood Education and Care for Children under the Age of 3," 2020.

²⁸ Demi G Siskind et al., "Who's Teaching the Teachers? An Exploration of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Program Faculty's Cultural Competence, Work Burnout, and Teaching Efficacy," *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* 44, no. 3 (2023): 425–44.

²⁹ Elizabeth Ngumbi, "Challenges Facing Early Childhood Teachers and Possible Solutions," *Education & Child Development* 1, no. 1 (2022).

³⁰ Eric Atmore, "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.v2i1.125>; 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>.

build a healthy relationship and feel empathy. The participants have a sound understanding of the socio-emotional nature of the ECCE learners and have been using some songs in the center. However, out of the six participants, only two were able to confidently employ age-appropriate songs to support the learners' socio-emotional development.

From the findings, the following emotional traits were taught with accompanying songs

➤ **Learners' skills in building a healthy relationship.**

If you get in trouble and you need a helping hand,
come to me 2x.

I will be your friend, I will never hurt you

Come to me 2x

Yes I love you, I do 2x

So come, come, come to me

In difficult circumstances, the song encourages kids to confide in a friend. Trust, loyalty, and an open mind to comprehend a friend's emotions are also fostered.

Another song by Ken Whiteley also supports children's socio-emotional skill development

The more we get together

Together, together

The more we get together

The happier we'll be

This song encourages playing, creating, and learning with friends while making you feel good. It also assists children in developing language and social skills, reminds them when it's time to come together, and helps them relax.

➤ **Building self-confidence in fearful and nervous children**

The participants also mentioned that some children are nervous, fearful and refuse to get along with others, the song below helps to ignite happiness and calmness in children

Everybody Claps Your Hands and Shakes Your Body, oh, yes
, Everybody Claps Your Hands and Shakes Your Body'

And

'If you are happy and you know it clap your hands'

The participants also teach the children empathy through songs.

Hold Someone's Hand, Shake Your Body a Bid and,

Just Say I Love You (yes Do It Again).

➤ **Songs to help children understand, express, label their emotions and what to do**

When I am happy, I smile, and I'm calm

When I am angry, I'm worried and feel bad

When I am sad, I cry, and cry

It is ok to show how you feel

When I am scared, I panic and scream

It is ok to show how you feel

If you're angry and you know it, blow it out

If you're angry and you know it, walk away! Keep your cool

If you're angry and you know it, tell someone, "I feel angry!"

If you are happy and you know it clap your hand

Music-based pedagogy is the best teaching strategy to support ECCE learners acquire as socio-emotional skills. While music and rhymes may not address all the underlying issues directly, they serve as effective tools to enhance children's emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, which are crucial in navigating difficult circumstances. Using these creative and engaging methods can create a positive and supportive learning environment for children, fostering emotional expression, resilience, and social competence, which are foundational skills for coping with various challenges. Thus,

educators with insufficient training in ECD are requesting musical upgrades to support the learners accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings have practical implications for ECCE educators and policymakers, highlighting the importance of incorporating music and rhymes into the ECCE curriculum to support socio-emotional development. The study highlights the importance of music-based pedagogies in ECCE settings and suggests that ECCE teachers should be trained in using music to teach socio-emotional skills. This could lead to improved socio-emotional development in ECCE learners, and better relationships and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, more elaborate and in-depth research on the use of music to improve the cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development of young children could be conducted in more centres and with larger or different populations, particularly among educators from remote rural areas who work with vulnerable children. Likewise, the ECCE teacher-training curriculum should be expanded to incorporate music-based pedagogy and the playing of age-appropriate instruments as autonomous subjects. In addition, teacher-training universities might organize a part-time curriculum to accommodate ECCE educators with limited or no formal music education experience.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined how early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) educators utilize musical pedagogies to enhance students' socio-emotional skills. The findings revealed that the high prevalence of violence in South African schools, despite measures put in place to address the issue by the Department of Education (DoE) and schools themselves, is concerning. Thus, the necessity to assist ECCE learners with socio-emotional features that can help them develop higher emotional intelligence, good coping skills, and successful relationships that promote success in many different aspects of life. The findings have demonstrated that music-based instruction improves ECCE learners' development of these abilities. The findings emphasize the need to adopt music-based pedagogies at this fundamental level of education for ECCE learners to effectively acquire socio-emotional skills, as well as the removal of any impediments to its implementation.

Suggestions for further research

This was a qualitative case study limited to six ECCE educators from two urban centers. Qualitative research provides valuable insights into the experiences of participants, offering a rich and detailed understanding of how music and rhymes can influence socio-emotional development in specific settings. The emphasis on a social constructivist paradigm aligns with the complexity of socio-emotional learning. Thus further quantitative and qualitative research is needed to explore the use of music in ECCE settings in rural areas and with larger populations. The studies could focus on questions such as: How does the use of music as a pedagogical medium aid the children's socio-emotional development? How does the children's cultural background affect their acquisition of socio-emotional skills through music? In conclusion, while the study on ECCE educators' use of musical pedagogies for socio-emotional development faces potential criticisms regarding sampling bias, ethical considerations, and methodological rigor, the research's emphasis on qualitative depth, participant well-being, and rigorous data analysis techniques strengthens its validity and reliability. By addressing these criticisms through transparent reporting, ethical adherence, and methodological clarity, the study contributes valuable insights into the pedagogical practices of ECCE educators and the role of music in supporting socio-emotional skills among young learners.

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