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Teachers' Perspectives on teaching the Primary School Music Curriculum: Experiences and Methodologies

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**Teachers' Perspectives on teaching the Primary School Music
Curriculum: Experiences and Methodologies**

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Education in Primary Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine teachers' previous experiences in musical education and its impact on their competence and confidence to provide valuable music experiences. Despite the limitations of this mixed methods study, the questionnaires (n=30) and semi-structured interviews (n=2) uncovered and explored teachers' perceptions on both existing and potential methodologies for the teaching of music at primary level. Examination of the findings confirmed that while teachers valued the benefits of musical education, there was a strong correlation between their previous musical experience and their levels of confidence and self-efficacy in delivering the Primary School Music Curriculum, particularly in the teaching of a musical instrument.

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List of Abbreviations

ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder

ASP Advanced School Placement

B.Ed. Bachelor of Education

CPD Continuous Professional Development

ITE Initial Teacher Education

NCCA National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

PCF Primary Curriculum Framework

PCK Pedagogical Content Knowledge

PME Professional Masters in Education

PSC Primary School Curriculum

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the reader with an overview of this research project. It will outline the origin of the dissertation, background and rationale behind the study, the objectives of the research project and the relevance of the research to the field of education. The structure and contents of the chapters that follow will be presented.

1.1 Origin of the Dissertation

This research study is motivated by an intrinsic passion for music held by the researcher which has been pursued up to and including third level education. Following preliminary discussions with a small cohort of primary teachers, the researcher formed a hypothesis that the teaching of music and an instrument at primary level would appear to be more challenging for some teachers in comparison to other curricular areas. This premise was then further developed to arrive at the broad research aims which this study is built upon.

1.2 Background to the Project

The current curriculum was introduced in 1999 as part of the Primary School Curriculum (PSC). Music is one of three subjects in the Arts Education curriculum, together with Drama and Visual Arts. The Music curriculum has three interrelated strands: Listening and Responding, Performing and Composing (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999, p.6). Since then, the area of music education has grown considerably in Ireland and is becoming increasingly widespread through considerable investment in the area. During this time Music Generation, which is co-funded by the Department of Education, has expanded nationwide since its establishment in 2010 (Music Generation DAC, 2023). The Creative Ireland Programme 2017 – 2022 which supports the Creative Schools initiative has also benefitted from government funding which supports primary schools in planning for the arts, including music (Creative Ireland, 2017, p.12). Although substantial contributions have been made in music education over the past number of years, there has been no significant change in the delivery of the music curriculum at primary level. It has remained largely static with regards to the provision of instrumental tuition since its commencement over two decades ago.

1.3 Rationale

The intention of this study is to examine teachers' perspectives on the teaching of primary level music with regards to their previous experiences and effective methodologies. It aims to explore how these perspectives influence practice in the classroom. Hallam (2010, p.3) states that learning and development of skills is enhanced by student enjoyment of their classroom music experience. Therefore, it is important to examine teachers' previous experiences in musical education and its impact on their teaching practices and their perspectives on the provision of music education in the future. The significance of this study is that the findings will provide insights into an aspect of music education that requires further examination. These findings may inform advances in the provision of instrumental tuition for primary school pupils as well as musical education for teachers in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). This study is of timely relevance, as the new curriculum explores Music as part of the Arts Education curricular area with vision, principles and components of a redeveloped Primary Curriculum Framework (PCF) (NCCA, 2023, p.18).

1.4 Dissertation Layout

This dissertation is set out in six chapters. Chapter Two will highlight common concerns in existing studies on the provision of primary music education and will provide a platform for which these issues can be further explored within this research study. The Literature Review will also address the merits of the current PSC, which is commended for being 'highly structured and sequenced, with well-defined skill and concept hierarchies in every element of music' (Choksy et al., 2001, p.83). Chapter Three will outline the mechanism for investigating these concerns and will justify why a mixed methods approach was most efficient for this study. The findings are presented by descriptive statistics and themes that emerged from coding of the data collected in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, these findings are interpreted and discussed in light of previous research, their implications and their importance. Finally, Chapter Six will provide an overarching summary to detail the findings of the research, limitations of the study and recommendations emerging from these findings for further research.

1.5 Conclusion

Chapter One has set the scene for the research study, outlining origin, background, rationale and aims of the research. The format through which the research will proceed in investigating the impact of teachers' previous experiences on the delivery of music education in the primary school has been indicated. This proposition will now be pursued throughout the literature to establish what is already known and what has yet to be determined.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present literature that informed the research proposal and established the research questions. The following review will critique the research literature, identifying challenges and potentials in relation to the teaching, learning and assessment of music, with particular attention to instrumental music, for primary school age children. These collections of literature will initially be utilised to examine research of music in the primary education in Ireland and in other countries. Literature will be explored that relates to theoretical models of the teaching and learning of music with their pedagogical application in developing children's practical skills with regards to playing an instrument. The review of literature explores whether there is a connection between theoretical and practical knowledge in relation to teachers' prior music experience or not, and the question of teacher-specialist collaborations and teacher-musician partnerships. The information gathered in the literature review will assist understanding of how teachers' previous experiences in musical education can impact on their potential to employ effective methodologies to support the teaching, learning and assessment of the Primary School Music Curriculum.

2.2 Music on the Primary Curriculum in the Republic of Ireland

This section will review literature relating to the PSC subject Music. The research literature presents limitations of the PSC on the provision of musical education to children in Ireland. The Arts Council published '*Deaf Ears?*' in 1985 to share the findings of concern so that education authorities could take appropriate action. The findings are on the basis of national surveys carried out by the Department of Education's Curriculum Unit and the report found that 'No formal scheme of instrumental music tuition takes place in the primary schools save at the personal initiative of individual teachers, most often with their own classes' (Herron, 1985, p.2). Alongside the absence of exposure to instrumental learning for primary school pupils, the findings also show that there was a drop-off in the provision of music education as pupils progress through school, with descriptions of pupils' music education in the primary school as 'at best, haphazard' (ibid., p.3). It is also stated that 'few primary school children experience making music with instruments' with a claim that 'no realistic grants are available towards purchase' (ibid.). Although the argument is critical of music in the primary education system, the report does acknowledge a greater deal of musical education in the earlier years

of primary school while identifying that ‘in the senior primary school classes the child’s music education is dependent on the individual teacher’s motivation and talent’ (ibid., p.3). Benson (in Herron, 1985, vi) also concludes from similar perspectives that ‘the majority of Irish primary school children leave school musically illiterate, with little vocal or aural training and with a repertoire of songs that is usually learned by rote’. With the consideration of these reportings and the timeframe to which they relate, it is important to examine more recent studies that relate to the current 1999 PSC implemented in primary schools. According to Rikandi (2010, p.21) the revised curriculum ‘is about participation, ownership of knowledge, self-expression and identity construction’ and can be likened to other international music provisions in education, namely Finnish. However, it is apparent from literature on the topic that it is still insufficient, especially with regards to instrumental experiences of music (McCarthy, 1999, p.39). McCarthy also suggests that ‘regular music instruction would enable them to engage meaningfully in music-making: they learn from confident, musical teachers who know and believe in the value of music’ (ibid., p.51). This means that the current curriculum does not provide for primary school pupil access to instrumental experiences, let alone tuition. This prompts examination of the practical implementation of the PSC including teachers’ impact on its delivery.

2.3 Initial Teacher Training

This section will review literature relating to teacher training and qualifications. O’Flynn et al. (2022) investigated the policy and provision of music in ITE in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This was a comparative study that employed literature reviews and survey. This article states that in Ireland, ‘music education is part of the core curriculum of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Professional Masters in Education (PME) programmes, with options to take additional specialist music and/or music education modules in two of the larger institutions.’ (ibid., p.368). The literature refers to the ‘detriment of preparing generalist teachers of music’ and criticises ‘offering fewer pathways for the emergence of specialist music teachers from the primary ITE institutions’ (ibid.) in Ireland. To refer to Russel-Bowie (2009, p.23), teachers’ beliefs ‘about the priority and challenges of music education’ during their training ‘will impact on their attitudes and practice when they are teaching in schools’. Hennessy (2000, p.184) reported that students consider musical ability stable or fixed rather than malleable. Literature reveals investigations into the musical education of primary teachers and strategies to further their teaching abilities in this area. Biasutti (2010) reported a

study investigating trainee teachers' beliefs about music abilities and learning. Based on the results of questionnaires it was found that 'the belief that musical abilities cannot be fundamentally changed is the same in primary trainee teachers' (ibid., p.64). In response, Biasutti professes that 'it is relevant to promote the idea that music abilities are not fixed, but it is possible to improve them with training and education' (ibid.). Literature that furthers this proposition includes Dogani (2008), investigating the way future teachers can be encouraged to frame their pedagogy for music teaching through reflection. Data was gathered through questionnaires, real time and video observations of teaching, discussions and reflective journals during student teachers experiences. Discussion on the results noted that teachers' 'initial choice of activity showed a preference for teaching the musical elements mostly and less creative improvisational activities'(ibid., p.135). The reason given for this was 'general inexperience with those creative aspects of music-making' (ibid.). It is concluded that student teachers exposure to experiencing 'the way music changes the person' and seeing 'the endless possibilities for communication through music-making with others' showcases 'possibilities for them to continue setting up such situations in their future teaching career' (ibid., p.137). This is more powerful than the attainment of knowledge about music theory, history or educational methods.

2.4 Teachers' Prior Music Education Experience and its Influence on Subject Knowledge and Teacher Confidence

In their inspection of teacher ability to scaffold and assess student learning, Wiggins and Wiggins (2008, p.20) found that teachers were 'unable to take the experience to a higher level because they were not knowledgeable enough to listen to student work and assess what it represented about their understanding of music' in a small group composing activity. In addition to observation of teacher ability to scaffold and assess musical learning, other literature reveals a study that was aimed at capturing the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of teachers through the framework developed by Loughran et al. (2004) of content representations. From this study, Zimmerman Nilsson and Nilsson (2018, p.26) concluded that 'the main source of music educators' professional knowledge is in experience, whereas knowledge from academic sources is of marginal character.' A strive for balance between theory and practice is notable from the abovementioned work, with a need 'for music education to connect more closely theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge' (ibid.). An article by Holden and Button (2006) investigates 'The teaching of music in the primary

school by the non-music specialist'. This study comprised of both quantitative and qualitative data including a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. In their findings, 'a significant relationship was established between initial teacher training in music, musical qualifications, personal interest in music and confidence to teach it.' (ibid., p.36). In addition to this, 'comments made at interview indicate that music is still perceived as a specialist subject, requiring expertise and performing ability' (ibid.). It also investigated if some teachers felt more confident teaching some aspects of music than others and if this affected their frequency of teaching these areas. The findings outline that 'singing was the aspect taught most frequently, followed by rhythm and listening'. Holden and Button (ibid., p.32) found this result 'surprising given the inadequacy felt by so many respondents'. However, it was concluded that 'respondents found composition and musical notation very difficult to teach' (ibid.). Similar findings to these US based studies are also apparent internationally. Russel-Bowie studied background and confidence in music education of pre-service teachers across five countries; Australia, Namibia, South Africa, USA and Ireland. The data was collected through a survey during lectures. Russel-Bowie (2010, p.71) found a 'moderate correlation between the confidence/ enjoyment and background of the students sampled, in that the stronger the background in music, the more confident they were in relation to music teaching'. It can be concluded from this finding that background in a subject influences the confidence and effectiveness of teachers in these subjects (ibid., p.75). Russel-Bowie (ibid., p.77). also suggests that 'in every country, pre-service teachers need to given the opportunity to develop their personal skills in music and art, as well as learning the pedagogy associated with teaching these subjects'. This approach is therefore in favour of the class teacher providing musical education for pupils at primary school level. Literature alternatively reveals arguments more favourable of specialist instrumental teachers. A closer look at the PSC (NCCA, 1999, p.76) for senior classes outlines that 'the child should be enabled to identify and perform familiar tunes form memory or from notation independently...instruments may include tuned percussion instruments (e.g. chime bars, glockenspiel, xylophone), tin whistle, recorder, keyboard'. Benson (1979, p.35) states that 'there are needs that cannot be met by the class teacher' and that 'all instrumental tuition beyond the elementary stages requires one-to-one teaching by a specialist teacher'. This raises the question of specialist instrument teachers that would have a 'higher level of instrumental expertise than does a class teacher, but would not necessarily have the same academic qualifications' (ibid.). Benson (ibid.) recommends operating schemes with

peripatetic instrumental music teachers across the country as piloted in Cork, Limerick and Dublin at this time.

2.5 Instrumental Instruction

2.5.1 Benefits Of Instrumental Instruction for Children

Abeles (2004, p.248) conducted a study in which there was ‘an examination of the influence of three orchestra/school partnerships on students' interest in instrumental music’. There was a focus on developing pupil interest in instrumental music. It is concluded that ‘having contact with highly skilled professional musicians can increase a student's desire to learn an instrument’ (ibid., p.260). Music educators (e.g., Doerksen, 2002; Gillespie, 1989) also advocate a variety of experiences to encourage children to join the school band or orchestra (ibid.). The results of this study suggest that orchestra/school partnerships could be one of those experiences. Literature describes benefits of instrumental music experience for children. Reviewed literature reveals a study in which pupils were given a battery of tests and trials including standardized tests and tasks developed by the authors. Anvari et al., (2002, p.126) state that results ‘indicate that music perception skill is reliably related to phonological awareness and early reading development’. Furthermore, it is found that ‘music perception is predictive of reading skill even when the variance shared with phonological awareness is removed, suggesting that skill in music perception is related to auditory or cognitive mechanisms beyond those tapped by phonological awareness’ (ibid.). This relationship between early reading and early music development is of significance with regards to assessment of music for indication of reading skill in the junior classes of primary school.

2.5.2 Environments for Instrumental Instruction

A multi-case study approach was used in terms of methodology for research by Flynn and Johnston (2016) of Ireland’s national music education programme, Music Generation. According to the authors, ‘one of the major findings of this research is the benefit there is in having an entirely new approach to establishing an inclusive and accessible performance music education programme in Ireland’ (ibid., p.5). Flynn and Johnston (ibid., p.66) also describe multiple benefits of music education for young people, including opportunities to ‘extend and deepen their social connections, broaden and widen their cultural understandings of others, engage in a process of collective meaningful music-making, contribute to a collective sense of wellbeing and belonging, and build trusting and supporting

intergenerational relationships with musicians and the wider community', opportunities which were made possible through Music Generation. Engagement with this literature raises the question of why these experiences which provide 'high- quality, inclusive, accessible, diverse, creative and sustainable performance music education.' (ibid., p.86) are not catered for through the PSC. Campbell (1995, p.13) explores the pedagogical differences of learning in school versus outside of school, as the author 'observed teenagers working collectively outside of school in a kind of mutual learning community'. Vygotsky (1978, p.86) observed that children's learning is enhanced by collaboration with skilled peers. In addition to the development of a mutual learning community, that is not a school environment, it was found that 'members centred on pedagogy, with participants teaching and learning the rules of rock music spontaneously among themselves' (Campbell, 1995, p.13). To refer again to Vygotsky (1978, p.192), learning does not occur in isolation, but within social and environmental contexts. Theory indicates that children's learning is enhanced by 'collaboration with more capable peers' (ibid., p. 86). Further literature on the topic reveals that away from the constraints of formal learning, which 'places a high priority on decontextualised knowledge or pure reasoning', outside of school, 'actions are intimately connected with objects and events' (Resnick, 1987, p.14). Lenor Pogonowski (2002, p.28) on American-based schools condemned the over emphasis on notational instruction, stating that when taught 'separately and mechanistically from personal [versus social] context of music making and consequently are not remembered from year to year as students ascend the public school ladder'. This literature, alongside pedagogical theories, confirms that context and environment can be a determining factor in musical learning. An alternative for traditional instrument learning revealed by Williams (2014) is the iPad. Williams celebrates the power of music-making with the iPad as an instrument, when combined with relevant pedagogies. William explains that 'it will do nothing without musicianship, creativity, and imagination supplied by a person. It has musical limitations just like any instrument, but in the right circumstances, it can be used to make amazing music' (ibid., p. 97). The 'positive impact on student participation and retention, student attitude's, self-esteem, on task behaviour, and the development of a greater range of musical skills and higher levels of musical understanding' (ibid.) is a sure promotion for the adoption of this pedagogical model.

2.6 Conclusion

Analysis of current literature on musical education for primary school pupils both in Ireland and internationally reveal that there are limitations to the provision of creative musical experiences for pupils. The results of many studies taken together indicate that music education plays an important part in pupil development and is a descriptor for reading at the early development stage. Alternative options for traditional instruments have been validated as reliable means for creative music-making. Although there are a myriad of factors that promote and support the merits of musical education for young people, there are impediments to such. The reviewed literature and their investigations show that this is due to the limitations of musical education on ITE programmes alongside teachers' pre-conceptualised beliefs of their prior musical experiences and knowledge playing a role in their ability to provide musical education. Further research and action is needed to establish best practice to implement effective methodologies for the teaching, learning and assessment of acquiring a musical instrument, including where significant challenges exist in the classroom. This topic merits further study based on the revelations of this chapter. Arising from the literature review, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are teachers' previous experiences in musical education and how does this impact on their confidence and competence in teaching an instrument/music in the primary school?
2. What methodologies and resources for teaching, learning and assessment in music are primary school teachers currently employing?
3. What challenges do teachers perceive in teaching music in the primary school?

The researcher aims to answer the research questions above through the research methods chosen which will be detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A critical examination of the current literature and prevalent issues in the current music curriculum was presented in the previous chapter. With consideration of the literature and the research questions posed, this chapter will discuss the methods of data collection most suitable as the researcher seeks to gather teachers' perspectives. This chapter will outline the chosen methodology for data collection and justify its selection. The theoretical basis which informed the research paradigm will be discussed, together with data collection and analysis. The chapter will finally consider the limitations and ethical issues arising from this small-scale study.

3.2 Research Paradigm

According to Kuhn (1970, p.75) the research paradigm is defined as 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, shared by members of a given scientific community'. With consideration of the importance of the research paradigm in this small-scale study, the paradigms of positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism were considered. A positivist approach allows the researcher to take an objective stance, remain external to the research process and investigate, confirm and make predictions around patterns of thought and behaviour. Opting for an interpretivist approach is more subjective with the researcher as part of the project and creating a relationship with participants for an in-depth exploration of human experiences, attitudes and beliefs. The research paradigm of pragmatism was finalised as the best suited paradigm to coincide with the mixed methodology approach. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012, pp.9-10) 'pragmatism is not committed to any one research philosophy or paradigm'. Accordingly, this small-scale study employs two approaches; questionnaires and semi-structured short interviews, which 'employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the problem' (ibid., p.10). These key elements were pivotal in the adaptation of this paradigm, as it is best suited to access teachers' unique perspectives in the chosen methods. In addition to mixed data collection methods, the pragmatism paradigm will also generate adoption of multiple data analysis methods.

3.3 Methodology

The methodology of mixed methods, emerging from the paradigm of pragmatism was chosen. This involved collecting quantitative and qualitative data which is measurable and interpretable. The employment of quantitative methodology allowed for the collection of observable and measurable data that could be quantified. In this study, the questionnaires facilitated the identification of teachers' perspectives, experiences and current teaching practices. However, as concluded by Savela (2018, p.40) 'each item can only be examined to a certain extent, providing only certain types of information applicable to all items'. The qualitative element allowed the researcher to overcome this by collecting interpretable data. Furthermore, in analysing the data collected in the semi-structured interviews, the descriptive element of teachers' unique perspectives, experiences and employment of current teaching practices can be interpreted, in which teachers comment specifically on their experiences. The mixed methods design, according to Morse (2009, p.1523), is defined as 'consisting of one complete project (called the core component), and strategies form a different method used as a supplementary component (conducted simultaneously or sequentially to the core component...). These two components address a single area of inquiry that cannot be addressed by the core component alone'. The depth of understanding required in this study relied on the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p.21) identify some strengths of mixed methods research, including the provision of the researcher to 'generate and test a grounded theory' as well as 'answer a broader and more complete range of research questions because the researcher is not confined to a single method or approach'. For these reasons, the researcher believed that the utilisation of both techniques to address teachers' perspectives strengthened the study.

3.4 Approach

Recommended approaches for pragmatism paradigm and mixed methods research include case study and action research. According to Simons (2009, p.10) the primary purpose of case study is to generate an in-depth understanding of a specific topic through different methods. The case study is also defined by Gerring (2004, p.341) as 'an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units'. This case study was based within two primary schools in which the researcher has taught and completed Advanced School Placement (ASP). The approach collected teachers' perspectives through qualitative and quantitative methods in this small-scale study, as a representation of primary school teachers

in Ireland. An educational case study is an ‘empirical enquiry’ (Tight, 2017, p.6) and the data collected allowed the researcher to ‘explore significant features of the case...create plausible interpretations... test for their trustworthiness... construct a worthwhile argument... and convey convincingly to an audience this argument’ (Bassey 1999 cited in Tight, 2017, p.58). The approach also included a pilot study, the purpose of which was to discover strengths and weaknesses of the collection methodology before the actual data collection took place (Van Teijlingen Hundley, 2001, p.4). This demonstrated suitable elements of the research instrument and highlighted improvements to be made. The pilot phase identified issues relating to the structure of some questions on the questionnaire, and informed a revised questionnaire prior to commencing data collection. Connectivity, humanness and empathy are valuable principles in semi-structured interviews in ‘helping to set participants at ease with the interview process, and as an effective tool in building rapport and establishing productive and empowering relationships between and among researchers and participants’ (Brown and Danaher, 2017, p.80). These principles were considered by the researcher and applied informally prior to interviews in this study.

3.5 Research Methods

Typical research methods for pragmatism are questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, journaling and document analysis. The methods chosen by the researcher are paper questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The paper questionnaires provide quantitative data for the study. The paper questionnaires were distributed by the principals to all teachers, with a hope to receive twenty returned questionnaires. The questionnaires were developed with reflection on the researchers literature reviewed. There were multiple choice options as well as optional comment sections. This provided choice and ease of completion for the participant. The questions sought information regarding the teachers experience in music, teacher training and in teaching music as part of the curriculum alongside questions regarding changes and supports that may be needed. These completed questionnaires provided quantitative information towards the research questions as proposed by the researcher in this study. The semi-structured interviews were short interviews of twenty to thirty minutes with two teachers from the schools, respectively. The researcher also prepared topic guides for the semi-structured interviews. This included a topic, question and question probes in order to attain the relative information needed for this qualitative research element of the study and to work towards answering the research questions with the combination of

both methods. Copies of the questionnaires and interview topic guides are attached in Appendices C and D.

3.6 Sample and Participants

The researcher as a postgraduate student studying a Professional Masters in Primary Education was responsible for seeking the permission of the school in which they were completing ASP and a school which they had previously taught in to conduct their research. School A is a rural primary school with nine teaching staff and School B is an urban primary school with thirty teachers. Sampling methods were selected to suit the criteria of participants in both quantitative and qualitative research. Inclusion criteria was applied to primary school teachers in the schools chosen. Exclusion criteria was applied to pupils, parents and student-teachers of the schools. The sampling method for the research was convenience as it was ‘non-random sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study’ (Etikan et al., 2016, p.2). Accessibility in School A and relationship with School B enabled the researcher to conduct the data collection during ASP. The sampling method for the semi-structured interviews was purposive, as the researcher identified teachers showing ‘availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner.’ (ibid.). For these reasons, this method was more suited over other available methods (random, snowballing or purposive). The teaching staff at the time of the questionnaire in both schools were mostly female teachers, with five male teachers overall. Participants indicated their experience on the questionnaire. A strong rapport had been established with the principals and teachers in both schools, which was particularly important for the semi-structured interviews. The willingness to share experiences and take part in questionnaires and interviews showed commitment to educational provision and professional development.

3.7 Data Analysis

There were multiple methods of data analysis for the collected information in this mixed methods study. The questionnaire was analysed by descriptive statistics while thematic analysis was employed for the interviews. Thematic analysis as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within data’ (Braun and Clarke,

2006, p.79), was suitable for the analysis of the data collected in the interviews. Thematic analysis occurred over six phases in which the researcher became familiar with the data collected, generated initial codes, sorted the different codes into potential themes, reviewed and refined the themes, defined and named these themes and finally produced the report. Thematic analysis allowed for flexibility in determining themes and prevalence of such (ibid., p.83). A sample of the thematic analysis process, employing coding, on a semi-structured interview transcript is attached in Appendix E.

3.8 Rigour

With regards to the quality of the research process and its outputs, the researcher considered the rigour for mixed methods which includes validity and reliability, trustworthiness and reflexivity. The mixed method approach ensured that the study was credible, as the use of triangulation was implemented as two sources of data were used. The written records of all aspects of the methodology, data collection and analysis, including coding, of the study ensure validity, conformability and reliability. The process of audio-recording interviews and later transcribing the text is the method of processing raw data gathered. The lack of generalisability and transferability is acknowledged as a limitation in the questionnaire method. However, with the implementation of the pragmatist approach, it can be assured that objectivity and subjectivity are rejected in the interview method. Trustworthiness is ensured in the qualitative study through member checking, 'if researchers engage with these concepts and involve participants in the interpretation of data, they can enhance the trustworthiness of their results' (Birt et al., 2016, p.1810). With regards to reflexivity and dependability, the researcher has kept their own biases in check throughout the project with the use of a critical friend throughout the process and also consciously avoided preconceptions and presumptions.

3.9 Limitations

This research explored the perspectives of thirty-two primary school teachers, including questionnaires (n=30) and semi-structured interviews (n=2). Although the data sources and analysis of such present coherent findings of teachers perspectives, these relate to the experiences of a small group of primary school teachers in two educational settings. It is acknowledged that there is a lack of generalisability and transferability of the findings to all primary school teachers in all contexts. Limitations of this project apply to the small-scale of the study. However, this small group of teachers, across two schools, have provided insights

into teachers' perspectives. The study has proven a possibility to be replicated. There are limitations to the mixed method of data collection, with regards to the qualitative method which include bias. The researcher has also noted *the interviewer effect* as a limitation, 'Research on interviewing has demonstrated fairly conclusively that people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions' (Denscombe, 2007, p.178). Informal exchanges with participants prior to interview creates rapport which ultimately influences and develops the nature of the interview. Denscombe (ibid., p.170) also mentions limitations of quantitative analysis, in this case questionnaires, which includes that there is 'little opportunity for the researcher to check the truthfulness of the answers given by the respondents'. The researcher, with consideration of these aforementioned limitations acknowledges the potential for a lack of generalisability, transferability and bias.

3.10 Ethical Issues

The research conforms to the ethical standards of Hibernia College, Dublin, through ethical approval of the Ethics Committee at Hibernia College prior to the commencement of the data collection. The research also conformed to the ethical standard requirements as outlined in the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). Participation in the interviews and questionnaires was voluntary, following informed consent of research participants and school principals (see Appendices A and B). Participants were also guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity and the right to withdraw. They were informed that data would be stored in accordance with GDPR the use of pseudonyms and the removal of any data that may identify them from paper, audio and digital records.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the strategies which the researcher employed. The mechanisms used by the researcher to achieve this were detailed with consideration of the alternatives for each area in the research. The research approach was guided by the paradigm of pragmatism and mixed methods research. The limitations and ethical considerations associated with the study were closely observed. The findings from data collection in the sample population of teachers through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will be presented and explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

Chapter three discussed the mixed methodology chosen for the collection of data for this research project, to attempt to answer the research questions posed in the literature review:

1. What are teachers' previous experiences in musical education and how does this impact on their confidence and competence in teaching an instrument/music in the primary school?
2. What methodologies and resources for teaching, learning and assessment in music are primary school teachers currently employing?
3. What challenges do teachers perceive in teaching music in the primary school?

This current chapter details the findings from these questionnaires and categorises the results of the semi-structured interviews according to the common themes identified.

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Main Quantitative Findings from Paper Questionnaires Surveying Teachers (n=30):

Of the 30 respondents who completed the paper questionnaire, 73% (n= 22) had five plus years of professional experience teaching in a primary school. No respondents to the questionnaire had more than thirty one years of service completed (Figure 1).

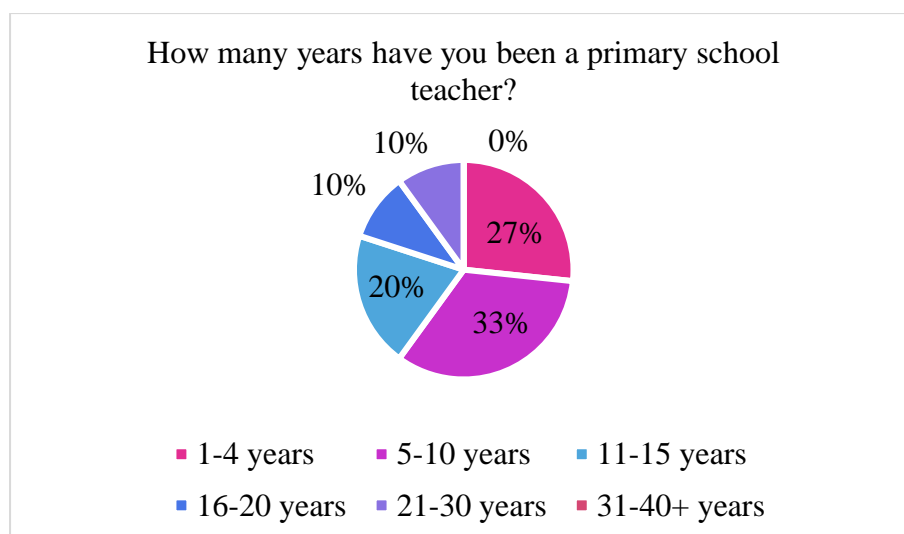


Figure 1: Participants' Teaching Experience

All participants were asked whether they had received musical training/education outside of the education system in primary and secondary school. The findings noted that only 53% of the population (n=16) had in primary and secondary school, while 47% (n=14) indicated they had not received musical training/education outside of the education system at all (Figure 2).

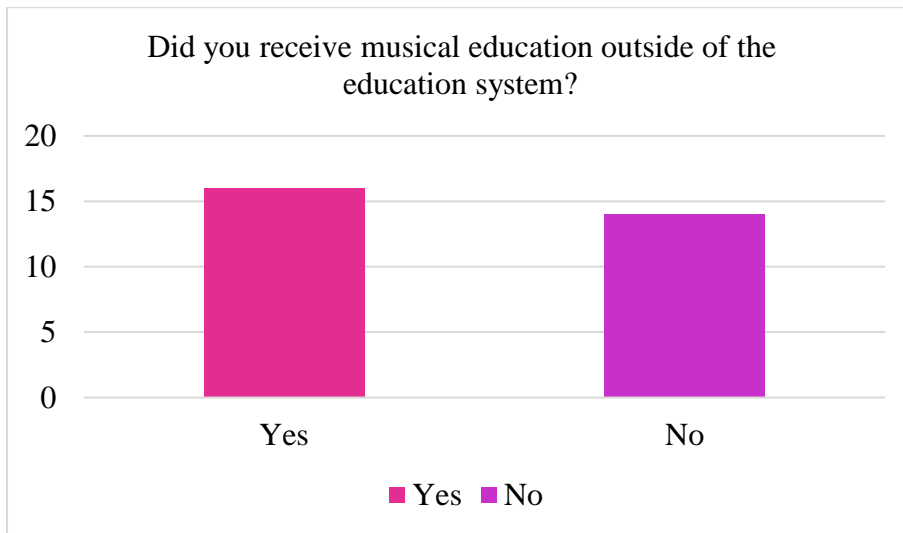


Figure 2: Participants' Musical Education outside of the Education System

Furthermore, 63% of respondents (n=19) indicated that they play an instrument, with the other 37% (n=11) stating no attainment of a musical instrument. Figure 3 highlights teachers' experience in playing an instrument, and the main instrumented played by those that responded affirmatively. All 100% of respondents (n=3) with twenty one plus years of teaching experience indicated playing an instrument.

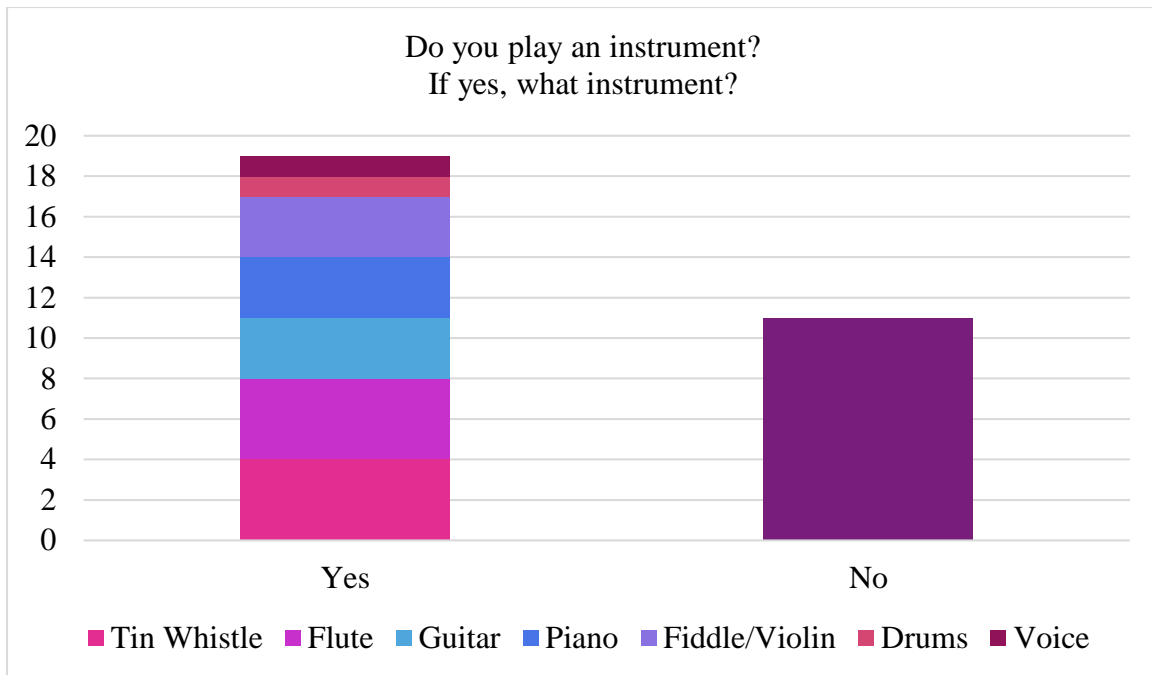


Figure 3: Participants' Experience in Playing an Instrument

When asked to respond in terms of their experience of provision of musical education in ITE, participants choose as many areas as applicable to their own experience. 63% of survey participants (n= 19) noted a curriculum focused education in Music. 43% (n=13) indicated a pedagogically focused provision of musical education as part of ITE and 20% (n=6) indicated experiencing a theoretically focused element. Only 7% of respondents (n= 2) experienced an instrumentally focused element of ITE in the area of musical education (Figure 4).

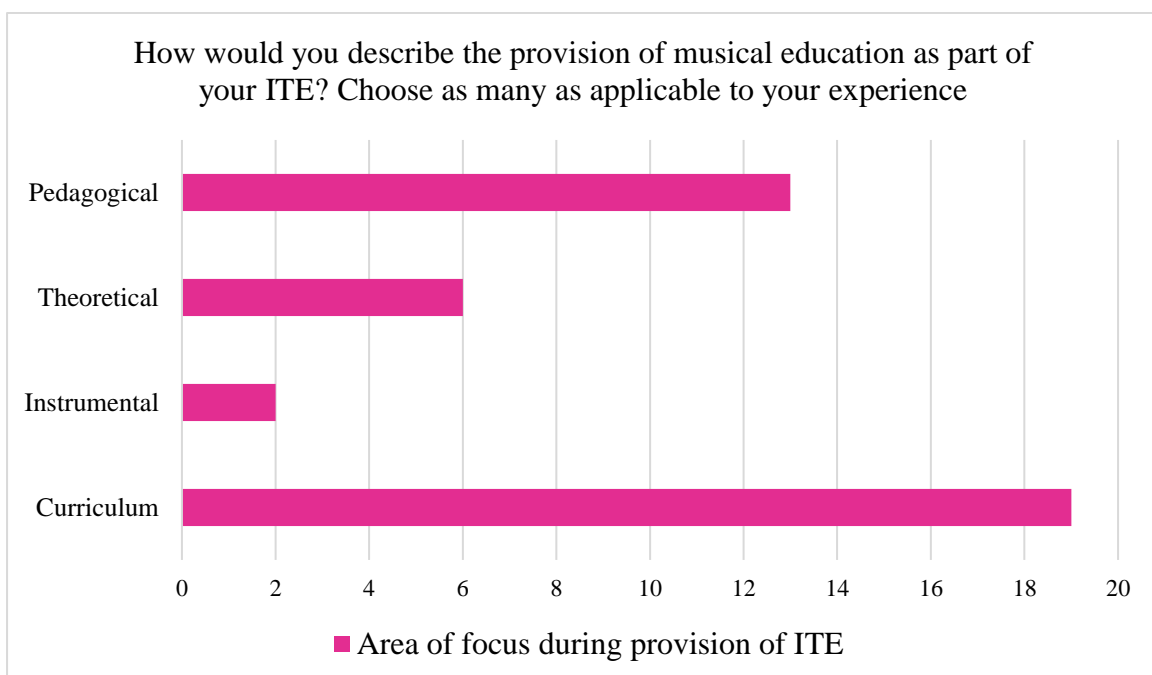


Figure 4: Participants' Description of their Experience of Provision of Musical Education as part of ITE

Although few teachers surveyed indicated an experience of an instrumentally focused element of ITE in the area of musical education, 67% of all participants (n=20) stated that they had taught a musical instrument in the classroom (Figure 5). 100% of those that taught a musical instrument in a primary school (n=20), taught the tin whistle or recorder in the classes ranging from 2nd to 6th class. No participants indicated teaching an instrument in Junior Infants to 1st class.

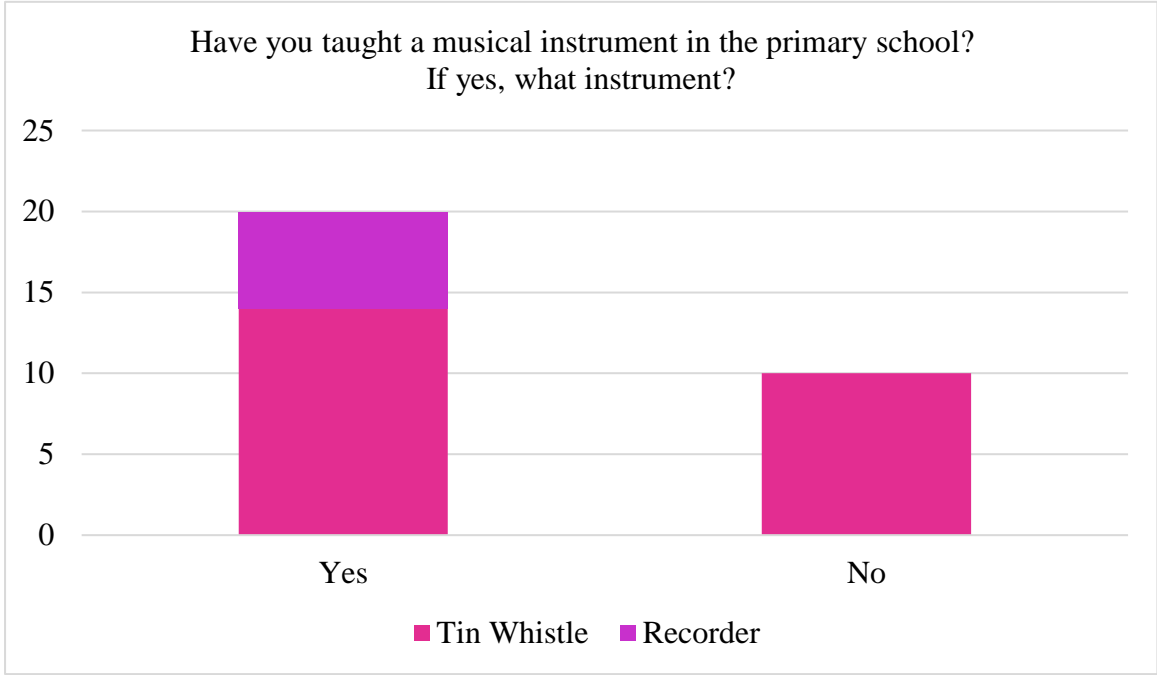


Figure 5: Participants' Experience in Teaching a Musical Instrument in the Primary School

When questioned in relation to competency levels in sight reading music on the staff, it is evident from participant's responses that there are varying abilities. The largest percentage of respondents at 34% (n=10) described their experience of sight reading music on the staff as 'Little to None'. This response was followed by 26% of respondents (n=8) indicating some experience. A combined 20% indicated good competency in either the treble (n=4) or bass clef (n=2), respectively. Only 20% (n=6) of respondents indicated that they are competent and confident in sight reading both treble and bass clef (Figure 6).

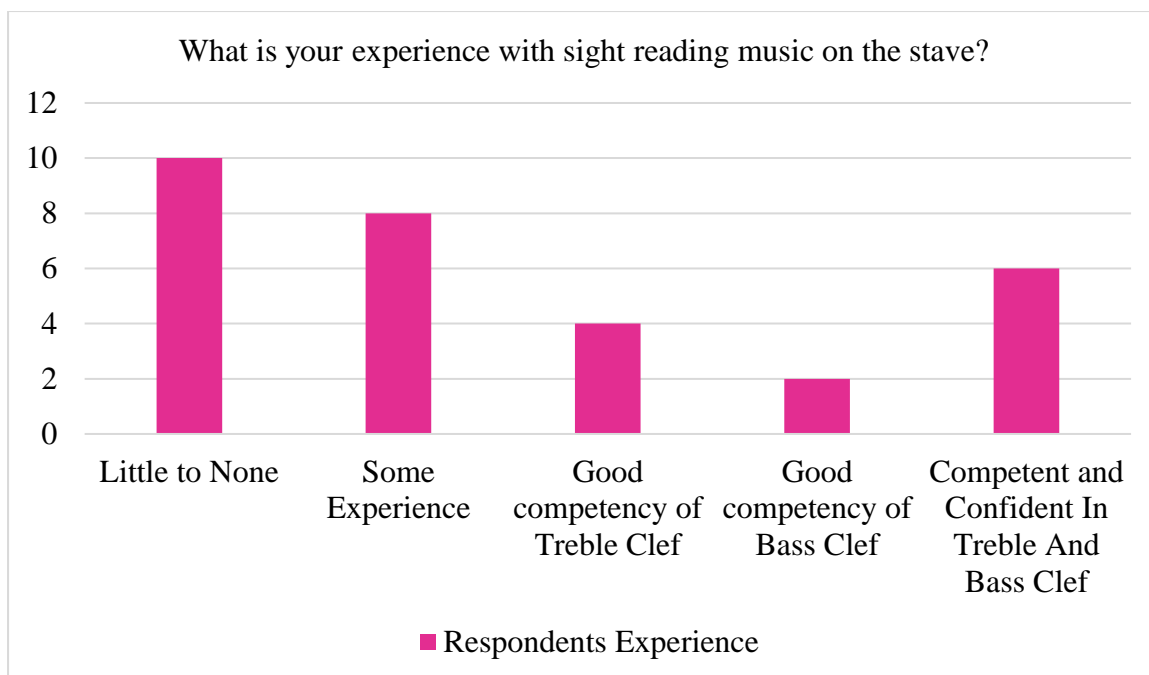


Figure 6: Participants' Competency in Sight Reading Music on the Stave

Respondents chose methodologies applicable to them in their current teaching of music. Both Talk and Discussion (n=26) and Active Learning (n=26) are employed by 86% of respondent teachers. Collaborative and Co-operative Learning is employed by 80% (n=24). Skills Through Content is used by 60% of teachers (n=18) and a further 46% (n=14) indicated using Local Environment. Problem Solving is employed by only 16% of the sample (n=5). One respondent (n=1) contributed another relevant methodology they employ, Teacher Modelling (Figure 7).

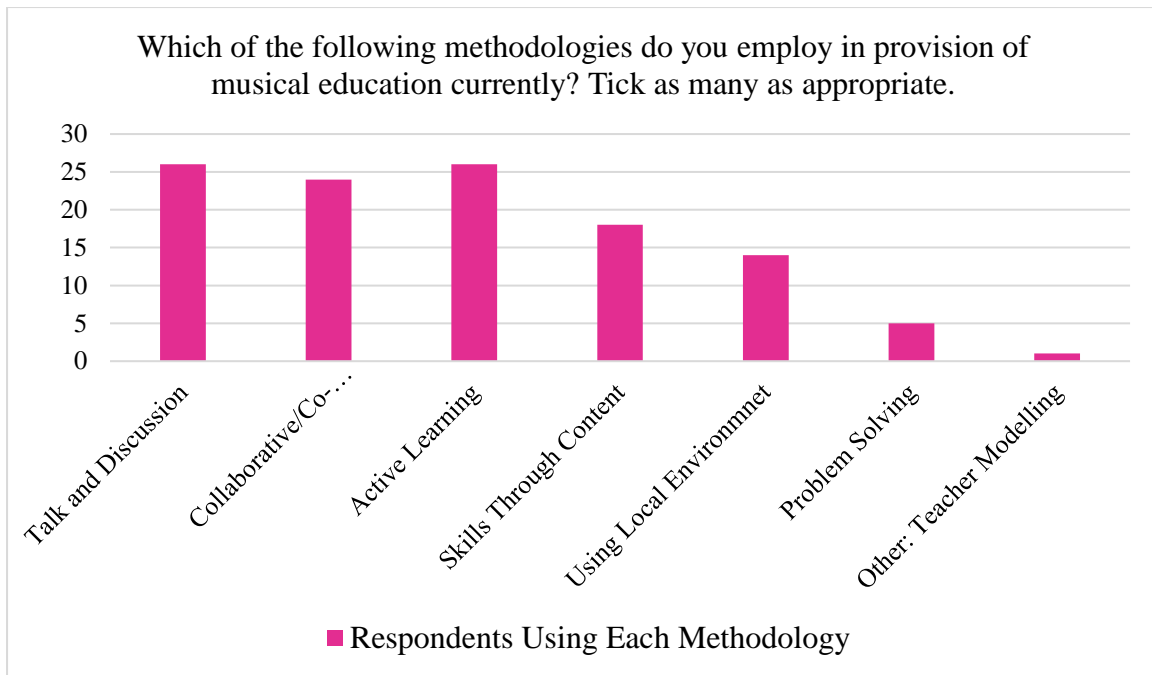


Figure 7: Participants' Use of Teaching Methodologies

When asked if they include informal or cross-curricular music education, 73% of participants (n=22) stated that they do so in their classroom (Figure 8).

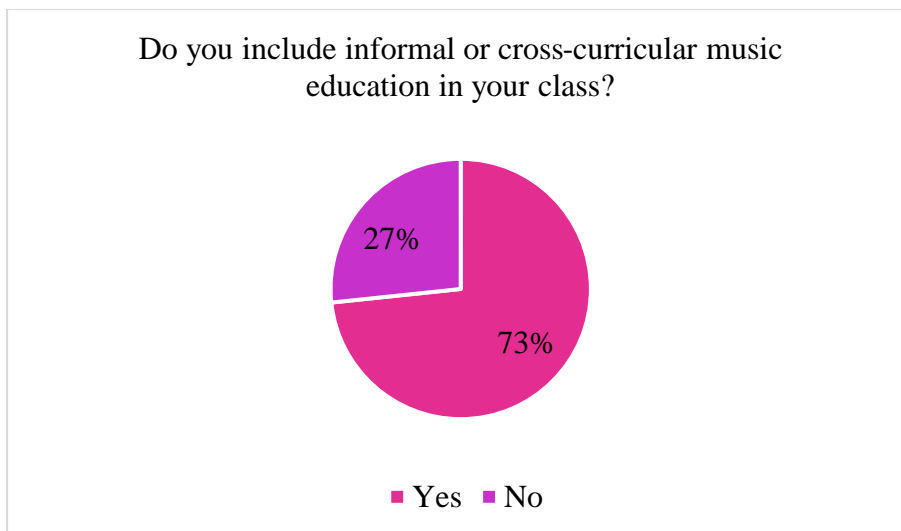


Figure 8: Participants' Use of Informal or Cross-Curricular Music Education

Respondents identified the types of assessment methods regularly used. It was noted that Teacher Observation is used by 93% (n=28) of all respondents. 73% (n=22) also indicated use of Teacher Questioning and 53% of teachers surveyed (n=16) use a variety of written, oral and aural Teacher Designed Tasks to assess pupil learning, whereas only 33% of teachers

surveyed (n=10) utilise Self-assessment methods. 0% of all teachers surveyed (n=0) use Portfolio Assessment in music (Figure 9).

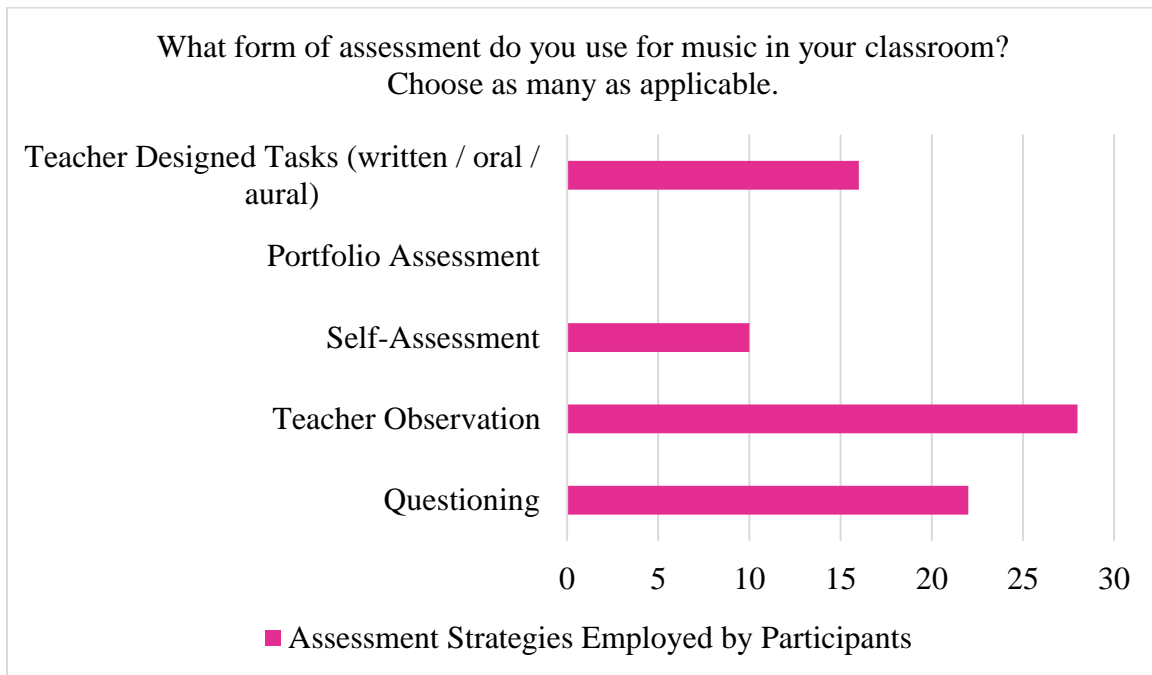


Figure 9: Assessment Strategies Employed by Participants

In relation to current teaching practices, 87% of those surveyed (n=26) claimed that the Composing strand of the current music curriculum is most challenging for them in teaching, learning and assessment. Only 10% (n=3) chose the Performing strand as most challenging, with the remaining 3% (n=1) claiming that the Listening and Responding strand was most challenging for them in teaching, learning and assessment (Figure 10).

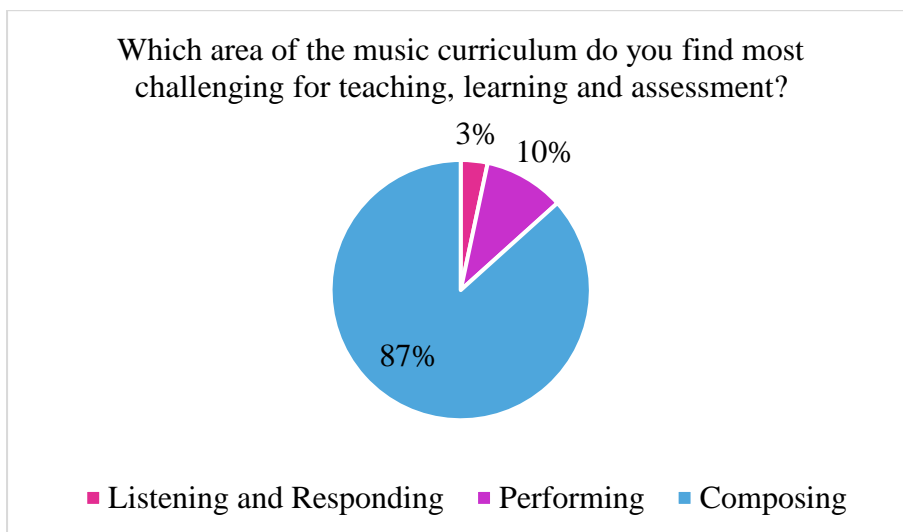


Figure 10: Most Challenging Curriculum Strand for Teaching, Learning and Assessment for Participants

In relation to continuous teacher development, 80% of surveyed respondents (n=24) would be willing to avail of musical tuition in an instrument in order to further their instrument competency, to teach pupils in their classes. A further 20% (n=6) responded that they would not willing to avail of tuition (Figure 11). Of those 20% (n=6) not willing to avail of tuition, 34% (n=2) had never taught an instrument nor received musical tuition

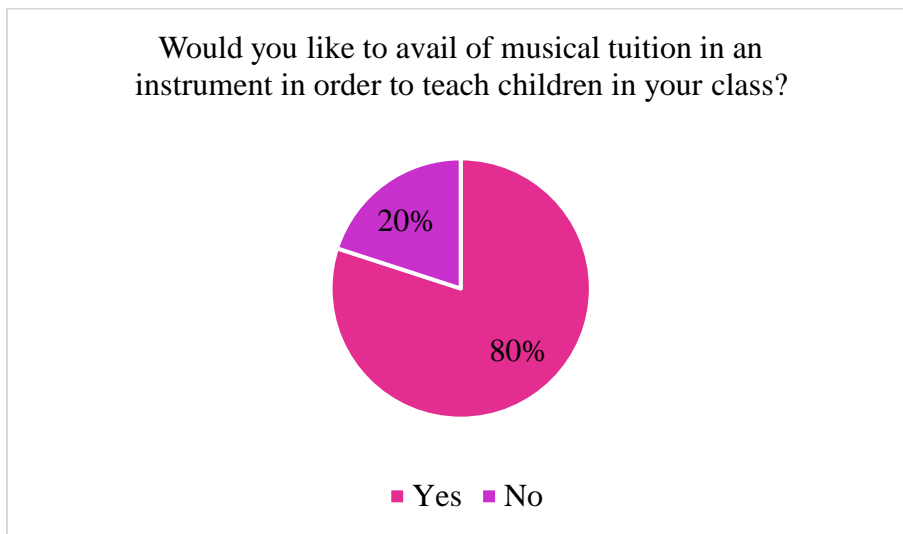


Figure 11: Willingness to Participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Music

97% of teachers surveyed (n=29) indicated willingness to facilitate an external music teacher in their class, in place of teaching music. 3% of participants (n=1) would not be willing to (Figure 12). This question was considered essential to identify if teacher's felt that an external specialist teacher would be more successful at teaching music to their class.

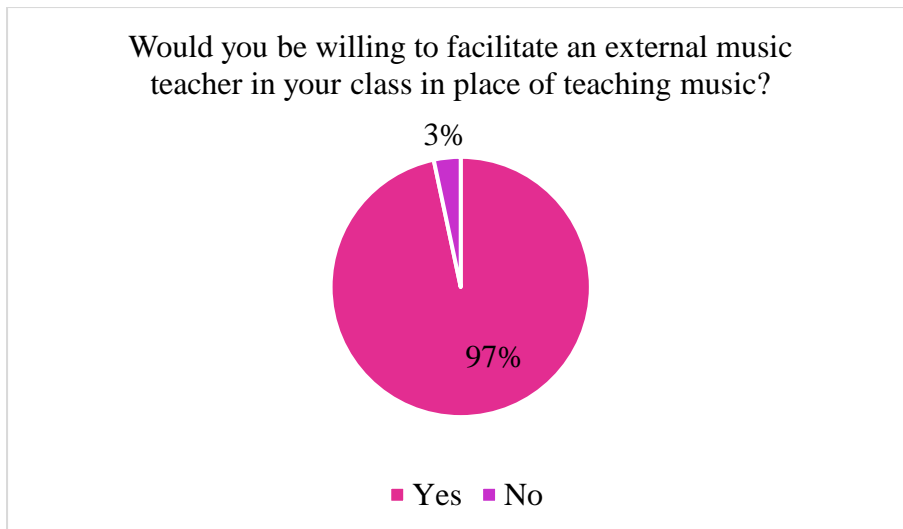


Figure 12: Teacher Willingness to Facilitate an External Music Teacher

With regards to future education in music for pupils, 90% of participants surveyed (n=27) opted that musical education should remain compulsory in the primary school (Figure 13).

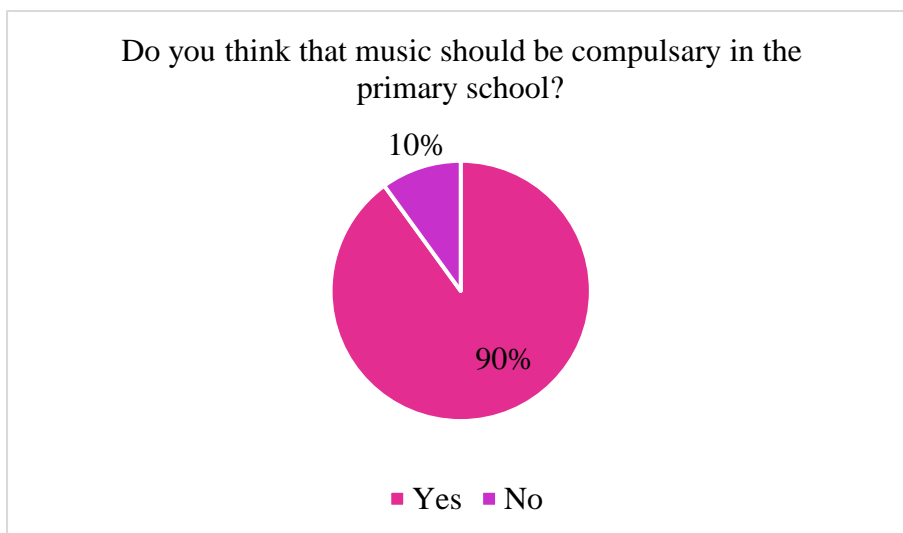


Figure 13: Teachers' Perspectives on Compulsory Music Education in the Primary School

4.2.2 Main Qualitative Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews (n=2):

Teacher A trained at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and has been teaching for 35 years. Teacher B trained at Hibernia College and has been teaching for 5 years.

The researcher conducted a thematic analysis using coding of the findings in order to categorise data. Four interconnected key themes emerged from data analysis of the semi-structured interviews: 1. Teacher experiences of Music in ITE, 2. Access to Instrumental

Tuition and Resources, 3. Continual Professional Development, 4. Collaboration with a specialist teacher.

4.2.2.1 Theme One: Teacher Experiences of Music in ITE

Teacher A described the emphasis placed on a compulsory music practical as part of the interview process for attaining a place in teacher training college, in which all applicants had to perform a vocal or instrumental recital. Teacher A recalled the interviewer saying ‘you won't have to sing to get into the college but you may have to sing to get out’ when they showed reluctance to sing in the interview, apart from in ‘a very large group’. Furthermore, Teacher A noted a practical music examination during ITE, for voice or instrument of your choice, for which Teacher A ‘went along and I had lessons’ in piano in order to be successful in graduating from the training college. Teacher B noted some musical instrument training as part of their ITE experience which amounted to ‘one day of training’ in an in-person setting, with a focus on voice and non-tuned percussion instruments, with no structured training in teaching of an instrument to a class. Both participants, Teacher A and Teacher B, expressed that playing an instrument is a discipline which must be experienced before it can be taught effectively. Both play the piano, but neither Teacher A nor Teacher B have taught an instrument to a class.

4.2.2.2 Theme Two: Access to Instrumental Tuition and Resources

Both teachers noted that a child’s access to musical instrument tuition is influential to their participation and therefore, inclusion and differentiation was mentioned. Interviewees expressed a high awareness and appreciation of the importance of musical education in the primary school. Teacher A described imagining the challenge of providing engaging music lessons in an instrument to a class of diverse pupil learning needs and abilities. However, Teacher A also mentioned the endless opportunities for pupils from different backgrounds, that might not get the chance to learn a musical instrument otherwise ‘it gives them opportunities in life as well because there’s music everywhere, every day and you know it’ll open up their ear to tune into it’. Teacher A described the current experience for pupils in their school to join the school choir to sing at the Sacraments; ‘we also have a teacher who specialises in the choir and she would organise classes for the First Holy Communion and for Confirmation’. Teacher B mentioned that ‘the infant teacher takes some pupils out in the senior end of the school in the afternoon for tin whistle lessons’. The opinion that access to

instrumental lessons at primary school level provides a chance for pupils from various social and cultural backgrounds to experience instrument acquisition was shared by both teachers. Furthermore, Teacher B detailed how resources would need to be available for effective teaching of an instrument in the primary school; ‘there would need to be a subsidised programme in place in the school to purchase or rent the instrument, or the costs would have to be covered somehow’, outlining the challenges of providing access to instruments in schools. Teacher A suggested that ‘instruments should also be given to every child in the in all schools’ as part of the Free Primary Schoolbooks Scheme in Schools (2023). Interviews revealed that it is pupils or their parents/guardians choice if the pupils partake in the choir events and tin whistle lessons, that are not taught with the intention to fulfil any of the curriculum objectives.

4.2.2.3 Theme Three: Continual Professional Development

Teacher A participated in in-service days for the 1999 PSC, however, neither interviewees have availed of CPD in musical education otherwise. Teacher B was positive that they would partake in CPD if it was offered to further their instrumental acquisition, and with the appropriate resources would be willing to ‘teach the pupils to learn an instrument like the ukulele in my classroom’. Teacher B stated that despite their ability to play the piano ‘my lack of confidence and experience in teaching a musical instrument makes it difficult to provide that opportunity for the pupils, in an instrument that would be practical like the tin whistle’. Data collected has shown that teachers are willing to participate to further their personal acquisition of an instrument, observe instruments being taught or participate in music as taught by specialist teacher within school.

4.2.2.4 Theme Four: Collaboration with a Specialist Teacher

Both participants expressed a positive attitude towards having a specialist teacher facilitate instrumental lessons. However, the opinion was clear that external teachers should work in collaboration with the class teacher to further facilitate teacher development and for the benefit of pupils as the class teacher will respond best to their individual learning needs. Teacher B stated ‘I would be willing to teach alongside them.. to provide classroom management or to support and help my pupils that needed extra attention during the lessons’. Teacher B spoke of positive contributions that the music curriculum can make to pupils, if it is implemented with the correct teaching strategies and stated that ‘my class would benefit

from an external teacher to teach an instrument, as otherwise they will not have that experience in this class...I think that learning an instrument would really benefit some of my pupils emotionally and socially...also one with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] and some that have learning difficulties'. The teachers expressed interest and willingness in using the external teacher as a resource to supplement their teaching of the music curriculum.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results obtained from the mixed methods study and attempted to piece together the data in order to give insight into teachers' experiences and perspectives of methodologies to support teaching, learning and assessment of music and an instrument in the primary school. Many participants revealed that they play an instrument or have previously taught an instrument in school, while the survey and interviews indicate a favourable attitude towards providing musical experiences for their pupils. However, the data collected on current teaching practices and an inclination shown towards external support for the teaching of an instrument suggest weaknesses in the provision of musical experiences. In the next chapter, these issues will be explored and debated further in line with the current literature in order to identify some of the most pertinent issues that are threatening the delivery of the primary music curriculum today.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the findings of the surveys and interviews were presented graphically and thematically, respectively. In this chapter, these findings will be further investigated to explore the extent to which a correlation exists with literature reviewed and to which the findings of the research correspond with the research questions previously presented. Chapter Five will now determine whether any new findings have been identified throughout the course of this small-scale research project and establish whether the data provided has any significance to the research.

5.2 What are Teachers' Previous Experiences in Musical Education and How Does This Impact on Their Confidence and Competence in Teaching an Instrument/Music in the Primary School?

From examining both the findings and the current literature surrounding music at the primary level, it is apparent that a deficit exists in teachers' previous experiences in musical education which impacts their confidence and competence in the subject. With regards to literature on the 'The teaching of music in the primary school by the non-music specialist', Holden and Button (2006, p.36) found that 'a significant relationship was established between initial teacher training in music, musical qualifications, personal interest in music and confidence to teach it.' These areas will be explored with regards to the above research question.

A correlation between previous musical education experiences and teaching music in the primary school was found by Russel-Bowie (2010, p.71), who stated that 'the stronger the background in music, the more confident they were in relation to music teaching'. This literature is reflected in the findings of this small-scale investigation. Considering that over half of the respondents had received musical training/education outside of the education system in primary and secondary school and 63% indicated that they play an instrument, the percentage that declare teaching the tin whistle or recorder in the primary school is only marginally higher. There is only a small percentage who do not play a musical instrument that have taught an instrument in the primary school. The participants' experiences reinforce Russel-Bowie's findings. Furthermore, neither interviewees previously taught a musical instrument in the classroom, despite the fact that they both play the piano. This was attributed

to a lack of confidence in their teaching of an instrument. The findings uphold the literature and it can be concluded that background in a subject influences the confidence and effectiveness of teachers in these subjects, especially in teaching a musical instrument. Engagement by primary school teachers in teaching an instrument may be affected by teacher self-confidence and inhibition, in the context of their own instrumental experiences or lack thereof.

With regards to music in ITE music, a study by O’Flynn et al. (2022, p.368) explored the provision of music education modules in ITE programmes in Ireland and identified that it is only possible to take ‘additional specialist music and/or music education modules in two of the larger institutions’. This literature further stated that there were ‘fewer pathways for the emergence of specialist music teachers from the primary ITE institutions’ (ibid.) in Ireland, and therefore a lack of musically trained primary teachers. When questioning the sample population resident within the Irish primary school system, the results proved to be harmonious with the literature, under various contexts. In sharing their experience of the provision of musical education as part of ITE, a small minority of participants indicated that they experienced an instrumentally focused element of ITE in the area of musical education. With reflection on current literature, Zimmerman Nilsson and Nilsson (2018, p.26) state that there is ‘a need for music education to connect more closely theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge’. This is apparent in teachers’ descriptions of musical education in ITE, in both questionnaires and interviews.

Although the sample population used in this research is relatively small, could these issues be similarly shared by other teachers in the wider population of primary teachers? Although over half of participants in the sample population would consider themselves able to play a musical instrument and have received musical training outside of the education system and as part of ITE, there is still some diffidence preventing the teaching of a musical instrument in the primary school for all pupils.

5.3 What Methodologies and Resources for Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Music are Primary School Teachers Currently Employing?

Respondents specified various approaches to their current use of methodologies in teaching, learning and assessment of music. By and large most teachers surveyed indicated employing both Active Learning and Talk and Discussion, followed by Collaborative and Co-operative

Learning, Skills Through Content and Using Local Environment which were also widely used. A small proportion of teachers indicated employing Problem Solving and Teacher Modelling while teaching music. Theory suggested that learning does not occur in isolation, but within social and environmental contexts (Vygotsky, 1978, p.192) and responses also show that nearly three quarters of participants include informal or cross-curricular music education. This corresponds with interview data, in which teachers described pupil involvement in school choirs. These findings uphold that there are Collaborative and Co-operative Learning opportunities as well as informal and cross-curricular learning experiences for pupils in Irish primary schools that apply theories such as those of Vygotsky to provide meaningful learning experiences in music.

The more demanding areas of teaching music in the primary school were identified by both literature and in the findings. Holden and Button (2006, p.32) concluded that 'respondents found composition and musical notation very difficult to teach'. Similarly, when investigating whether some teachers felt more confident teaching some aspects of music than others, the majority of 87% claimed that the Composing strand of the current music curriculum is most challenging for them. Correspondingly, Wiggins and Wiggins (2008, p.20) found that teachers were 'unable to take the experience to a higher level because they were not knowledgeable enough to listen to student work and assess what it represented about their understanding of music' in a small group composing activity. Moreover, when questioned in relation to competency levels in sight reading music on the staff, only one fifth of respondents indicated confidence and competence in sight reading both the treble and bass clef on the staff. The correlation between teacher experiences in music education and competence levels in sight reading music is evident. As supported by literature, a lower level of competence and confidence in the strand of Composing resulting from a lack of musical experiences and education contributes to the challenge shared by a majority of the participants in the teaching, learning and assessment of this strand.

5.4 What Challenges do Teachers Perceive in Teaching Music in the Primary School?

With the impact of teachers' previous experiences in musical education on teaching and current teaching practices in mind, it is necessary to explore teachers' perspectives on the future of music in the primary school, in the context of collected data and literature.

Both methods of data collection indicated favourable attitudes of participants towards furthering development in teaching and learning of an instrument. 80% of teachers indicated willingness to avail of musical tuition in an instrument through CPD in order to advance their competency in an instrument to be enabled to teach pupils in their classes, as did teacher A and B in interview, respectively. Although the majority of respondents demonstrated a positive attitude to furthering their own instrumental competence and expertise, it is noted with consideration of Teacher A's description of the commitment to attending piano lessons as a full-time student teacher, that this course of action would place a lot of commitment on the primary school teacher.

Another course of action, which a greater majority of respondents were in favour of, is to facilitate a specialist teacher. Questionnaire respondents would almost unanimously be willing to facilitate an external music teacher in their class, in place of teaching music. Literature that explores this concept reflects positively on the arrangement, as Benson (1979, p. 35) states that 'there are needs that cannot be met by the class teacher' with regards to musical education in an instrument. Although an external teacher may have a 'higher level of instrumental expertise than does a class teacher', they may 'not necessarily have the same academic qualifications' (ibid.). Both interviewees described the benefits and opportunities that playing an instrument would provide for their pupils, and how they would support a specialist teacher to achieve this. Providing a specialist instrumental teacher for pupils in the primary school is supported in literature by Abeles (2004, p.260) who states that 'having contact with highly skilled professional musicians can increase a student's desire to learn an instrument'. Although teachers may not feel confident to provide these musical learning experiences, interviewees have indicated that they would be willing to co-teach with a peripatetic instrumental music teachers, to support the individual learning needs of the pupils in their class. This arrangement may overcome the conflict realised by Benson above in the employment of a specialist music teacher.

With regards to future education in music for pupils in the primary school, the majority of respondents supported and valued the provision of musical education, as 90% of participants surveyed opted that musical education should remain compulsory in the primary school. To refer to Russel-Bowie (2009, p.23), teachers' beliefs 'about the priority and challenges of music education' during their training 'will impact on their attitudes and practice when they are teaching in schools'. This correlates with the findings, as participants who were not

willing to receive tuition or facilitating an external teacher identified that they had not previously had any instrumental or musical education experiences. Teachers' perspectives on the merits of music education are coloured by their previous experiences in music, with little impact of the education system and ITE on enhancing their background in the subject.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the findings from the research study and investigated the extent to which these findings correlated with the current literature. This study demonstrated a lack of confidence and competence in teachers with regards to teaching an instrument in the class and insufficient ITE in musical education, especially instrumentally. These inadequacies emerge in the primary school as a barrier to the delivery of music education. Hennessy (2000, p.184) reported that student teachers consider musical ability stable or fixed rather than malleable, 'that being able to `do' or teach music requires special gifts that are only attainable by, or given to, a chosen few'. This is an aspect of divergence between findings and the background literature, as the majority of participants indicated that they would be willing to avail of tuition. In support of this, Biasutti (2010, p.64) professes that 'it is relevant to promote the idea that music abilities are not fixed, but it is possible to improve them with training and education'. However, a course of action for providing this training or education for teachers and student teachers is not explored adequately in research literature. Despite these current limitations, participants show a willingness to further themselves in their musical abilities or facilitate an external teacher in the area of musical education to ensure an opportunity to experience music and the learning of an instrument for their pupils from a teacher with a 'higher level of instrumental expertise' (Benson, 1979, p.35). With this in mind, the next chapter will propose suitable recommendations that may be used as basis for future research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore how primary school teachers' previous experiences in musical education influenced their confidence and competency in teaching, learning and assessment of an instrument, current methodologies used in teaching music, and ultimately, teachers' perspectives on challenges perceived teaching music in the primary school.

6.2 Overview of Findings

Primary teachers with diverse experiences were represented in the questionnaires and in the undertaking of semi-structured interviews which captured perspectives, experiences and personal anecdotes of two teachers with differing training and teaching careers. The study has returned the following conclusions.

6.2.1 Previous Experience

Research revealed that over half of teachers had previous experiences in musical education outside of the education system, including the ability to play an instrument which was shared by a majority. However, a low self-efficacy impacts on teaching an instrument, which contributed to most participants favouring a specialist teacher. This is supported by previous research which found that 'music taught almost exclusively by generalists falls short of attaining the goals articulated in national curriculum document' Wiggins and Wiggins (2008, p.24) when considering curricular frameworks worldwide.

6.2.2 Current Teaching Practices

Most participants in the survey and interviews use various methodologies for teaching, learning and assessment of music in their classroom and provide informal or cross-curricular opportunities. On the contrary, challenges exist in facilitating areas of the curriculum such as the Composing strand. Difficulties to teach aspects of the curriculum are attributed to lack of confidence and competence by participants.

6.2.3 Future of Music Education

Participants expressed a positive attitude towards the future of music education in primary schools. The majority indicated favouring the continuation of music as a compulsory

curricular subject, which is reflected comparably in their willingness to avail of musical tuition in an instrument or to facilitate an external specialist teacher.

6.3 Limitations

As explored in depth in Chapter 3, this was a small-scale study within a short time frame. Despite the carefully chosen data collection methods, the findings are not transferable to the overall population of teachers in primary schools, as the sample population is too small. The research population was confined to two educational settings, inhibiting the generalisability of the research finding (Cochran-Smith, 2005). Moreover, it is possible that discrepancies may arise within the data that could distort it, despite the efforts made to minimise bias and human error in the results. Although generalisability is not applicable to this small-scale study, the findings and recommendations are still merited, at least to the ‘extent to which a teacher reading it can relate it to his own teaching’ (Bassey, 1981, p.73). Ultimately, the study collected both quantitative and qualitative data from teachers with diverse experiences, despite the lack of transferability and generalisability.

6.4 Recommendations

These findings provide a platform for future research with a larger sample of the teacher population to investigate if music education experiences during ITE are uniform throughout the country and if the education provided is sufficient in moulding primary school teachers with the confidence and capabilities to share valuable musical experiences with their pupils.

With regards to a practical-based recommendation for the researcher’s own professional development, the researcher will endeavour to further explore their own practice in teaching instrument and engage in reflective practice as they embark on their journey as a primary school teacher.

The findings may also be of assistance to schools in their whole school plan for music, in encouraging consideration of collaborating with the wider school community to provide musical tuition for teachers and/or pupils. This may support schools in fulfilling the curriculum which suggests ‘allowing for additional support from colleagues, parents, local music groups and audio-visual resources where these are appropriate’ (NCCA, 1999, p.9). Alternatively, it may encourage schools to employ a specialist music teacher, as literature reveals that ‘music is still perceived as a specialist subject, requiring expertise and

performing ability' (Holden and Button, 2006, p.36). Future studies may investigate potential aims for the PCF (2023) with regards to the role of music and learning an instrument through integrated learning experiences in stages 1-2 and with subject-specific learning outcomes in stages 3-4. (NCCA, 2020, p.11).

6.5 Conclusion

As a result of completing this study, this researcher has become more aware of the importance of supporting and strengthening competency levels of music in teachers, thus enhancing the instrumental experience for primary school pupils. Further research is required into facilitating specialist external teachers or interventions to afford primary school teachers the appropriate musical experiences in education, ITE and CPD to ensure that musical and instrumental education is an accessible reality for all pupils at primary level.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Principals' Information Letter and Principals' Consent Form

Principals' Information Letter

Dear Principal,

I am writing to you in relation to a research study I will be undertaking in fulfilment of my Professional Masters in Education degree. It would like to provide you with information about my study and seek your consent to conduct the research with members of your teaching staff.

Analysis of current literature on musical education for primary school pupils both in Ireland and internationally reveal that there are limitations to the provision of creative musical experiences for pupils. The results of many studies taken together indicate that music education plays an important part in pupil development and is a descriptor for reading at the early development stage. Alternative options for traditional instruments have been validated as reliable means for creative music-making. Although there are a myriad of factors that promote and support the merits of musical education for young people, there are impediments to such. Literature shows that this is due to the limitations of musical education on initial teacher education programmes alongside teachers' pre-conceptualised beliefs of their prior musical experiences and knowledge playing a role in their ability to provide musical education.

The objectives of this research are to identify which methodologies are more effective in supporting the teaching, learning and assessment of pupil acquirement of a musical instrument in the primary school from a teachers' perspective, examine whether teachers feel adequately resourced and equipped to deliver the music curriculum to pupils, and explore the challenges and benefits of implementing the methodologies for instrumental tuition identified in the research. To address these areas, I propose to distribute paper questionnaires to primary teachers and conduct semi-structured interviews. My project has received ethical approval from the Hibernia College Ethics Committee.

Interviews would be held and questionnaires distributed at the convenience of the school and of the teachers concerned on school premises. With their written consent, interviews will be recorded for transcription and dissemination purposes. Participation in the study is voluntary. Participants may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. No school, teacher or student will be identified specifically in any publication of the work.

I am writing to you to gain your informed consent that I may distribute questionnaires to your teaching staff and request an interview with a member of your teaching staff at a time convenient for the school and the teachers concerned. Confirmation of your consent can be sent either to me directly via email [redacted] or by signature of the attached consent form. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone [redacted] or at the abovementioned email address.

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[redacted], Researcher.

Principals' Consent Form

I, _____ have read and understood the Letter of Information provided to me by the researcher. I agree that in order to conduct research about music education interventions used in my school, she may request to distribute questionnaires and request an interview with a teacher and upon receipt of their consent may conduct the interview on school premises at times convenient for the teacher and the school. I understand that participation is voluntary and that there are no physical or psychological risks associated with the study. I know that all answers provided will be used for the purposes of the study only and that all responses will identify no individual or the school itself.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Research Information Sheet and Consent Form

Research Information Sheet	
Researcher's name:	[redacted]
Organisation:	Hibernia College Dublin
Title of study:	Teachers' Perspectives on teaching the Primary School Music Curriculum: Experiences and Methodologies
<p>Outline of research study: Analysis of current literature on musical education for primary school pupils both in Ireland and internationally reveal that there are limitations to the provision of creative musical experiences for pupils. The results of many studies taken together indicate that music education plays an important part in pupil development and is a descriptor for reading at the early development stage. Alternative options for traditional instruments have been validated as reliable means for creative music-making. Although there are a myriad of factors that promote and support the merits of musical education for young people, there are impediments to such. Literature shows that this is due to the limitations of musical education on initial teacher education programmes alongside teachers' pre-conceptualised beliefs of their prior musical experiences and knowledge playing a role in their ability to provide musical education.</p> <p>Objectives of the project: The objectives of this research are to identify which methodologies are more effective in supporting the teaching, learning and assessment of pupil acquirement of a musical instrument in the primary school from a teachers' perspective, examine whether teachers feel adequately resourced and equipped to deliver the music curriculum to pupils, and explore the challenges and benefits of implementing the methodologies for instrumental tuition identified in the research.</p> <p>What would I need you to do? Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a paper questionnaire / a short semi-structured interview (20-30 minutes) with the researcher. Any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential. Quotes from the questionnaire may be used and may also be published in the research however your name and the name of the school will not be published. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript will be made available to you on request. A copy of the questionnaire will be made available to you on request. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. It may also be used in conference proceedings or used in academic articles. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.</p> <p>What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Masters of Education (Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.</p>	

Consent Form	
Researcher's name:	[redacted]
Organisation:	Hibernia College Dublin
Title of study:	Teachers' Perspectives on teaching the Primary School Music Curriculum: Experiences and Methodologies
<p>I have been fully informed and read the information sheet about this study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study. I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without my withdrawal having an adverse effect for me. I agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference. I have been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher. I am satisfied that any information I give to the researcher will be kept confidential. My name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report.</p> <p>Participant's name (printed) _____</p> <p>(signature) _____ Date _____</p>	

11.	<p>Which area of the music curriculum do you find most challenging for teaching, learning and assessment? Tick one.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Listening and Responding <input type="checkbox"/> Performing <input type="checkbox"/> Composing</p>
12.	<p>Which of the following methodologies do you employ in provision of musical education currently? Tick as many as appropriate.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Talk and Discussion <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative/Co-operative Learning <input type="checkbox"/> Active Learning <input type="checkbox"/> Skills Through Content <input type="checkbox"/> Using Local Environment <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving Please list any other relevant methodologies _____</p>
13.	<p>What form of assessment do you use for music in your classroom? Tick as many as appropriate.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Questioning <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher observation <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Portfolio assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher designed tasks (written / oral / aural)</p>
14.	<p>Do you think that musical education should be compulsory in the primary school?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Yes No</p>
<p>Thank you for completing the questionnaire!</p>	

Appendix D: Sample Interview Questions structured in a Topic Guide

Topic Guide Interview Questions		
Researcher's name:	[redacted]	
Organisation:	Hibernia College Dublin	
Title of study:	Teachers' Perspectives on teaching the Primary School Music Curriculum: Experiences and Methodologies	
Topic Guide	Question	Probe
Opener	Tell me about your experience with music	Experience in primary and secondary education, ITE, CPD and teaching Experience outside of education system
Role Clarification	Describe the musical experience you aim to provide to your class	Curriculum focused Extra-curricular External teachers for instruments
Methodologies	Describe some of the methodologies you find effective in providing musical education	Active learning Collaborative / Co-operative work Choir / Ensemble Learning by rote / by heart Textbooks / Programmes
Training	To what extent do you feel you receive adequate training in ITE and CPD for providing the music curriculum?	ITE CPD / Teacher training Focus on curriculum/instrument/theory/pedagogy
Shared Goals	To what degree do you feel your delivery of the subject is supported by the curriculum and whole school plan for music?	Curriculum Shared roles Whole school plan Specialist teacher Teacher with interest in music
Problem Solving	Can you think of any changes you would make to the current curriculum and provision of music education in the primary school?	Music curriculum External teachers Extra-curricular ITE CPD / Teacher training Choice subject or Compulsory

Pupil Outcome	What difference, if at all, do you think A) the music curriculum and B) learning an instrument is making to pupils?	Musical education Overall education Emotional/Social concerns Language acquisition
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Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Extract of Semi-Structured Interview Transcript

Theme One: Teacher experiences of Music in ITE

Theme Two: Access to Instrumental Tuition and Resources

Theme Three: Continual Professional Development

Theme Four: Collaboration with a specialist teacher

Interviewer: In your own classroom when you would be teaching music what are some methodologies that you find effective?

Interviewee: Well, in teaching music I think that active learning is very important, and I think that it's very important that children are up and moving and singing. I also think group work with percussion instruments, we've lots of percussion instruments in the school and I think that's very important part of it. I also think that it's so nice for children to have their own little party pieces as well and that they're able to sing so it's important to learn to sing songs off by heart. We also use the Dabledoo programme, and I think it's very effective programme in the school.

Interviewer: To what extent do you feel that you received adequate training in your initial teacher education or in CPD since qualifying for providing the music curriculum?

Interviewee: Oh yes well, the Initial Teacher Education was the focus on the curriculum and how to use the different instruments. And to listen and respond. Like when we were in the training college we sat, and we listened to the music, and I realised how enjoyable all that was and then to respond with different activities and would have continued that in the classroom.

Interviewer: And when the new music curriculum was introduced in 1999 did you receive any in service days or CPD training for music in particular?

Interviewee: Yes, we had in service days as we had for all the other subjects and sure it was a whole new world for us with the with all the new ideas that were available in the books. And as well a lot of companies brought out new books so there was a new range of books going through all the classrooms in the primary school which we had. And we really would have based our main part of our music on the books for get over there for the week over the month or whatever and that would have continued, and it was it step by step because it continued right up through the school.

Interviewer: So to what extent do you feel that the delivery of music in your school is supported by the curriculum and also the whole school plan for music?

Interviewee: Yes well, the whole school plan for music follows the curriculum but then we supplement it with bits and pieces that suits our school from the various programmes that are available. Then we also have a teacher who specialises in the choir, and she would organise classes for the First Holy Communion and for Confirmation and so that's very good. And then for, you know, we would still have our school plays and our school musicals and that and so all teachers help about but those with the great talent for instruments and that, would definitely help all the children and all the teachers as well.