

PERSPECTIVES OF CHILDREN (7 TO 12 YEARS OLD) TOWARDS WESTERN CLASSICAL AND ENGLISH POPULAR MUSIC EDUCATION IN MUMBAI

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Abstract

The perspectives of children (7 to 12 years) towards selected aspects like the type and description of music classes being attended, attitudes towards their music education, benefits and challenges faced with regards to their western classical and English popular music education in Mumbai and suggestions about some teaching methods/styles that could be incorporated in their music lessons, were explored. Judgmental sampling was used to select the sample size of 40 children. A self-constructed interview schedule was used for the children attending western classical and/or English popular music classes. The data was analysed quantitatively (frequencies) and qualitatively (theme extraction and thick description). The subjects of music classes attended by the children were piano, violin, vocals, guitar, recorder, etc. which were individual and/or in a group. Majority of the children who went for other classes besides their music class stated that they enjoyed their music class the most. The common challenge that was found amongst children was the 'music practice time' the child invests in. Through this study, it can be acknowledged that even though Western Classical and English Popular Music education in Mumbai has its challenges, there are multiple overall benefits for children.

Index terms: Music education; Western classical music education; English popular music education.



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INTRODUCTION

According to Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner (1983), music intelligence is equal in importance to logical - mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily - kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence.

Likewise, cognitive processes are affected by contact with music. The importance of music on a child's thinking and its vital part as a source of knowledge and profound understanding of the world functions as a component in nurturing humanism and with the aid

of music, the child cultivates an intense manner of cognizing the surrounding world. (Sharma, 2008, p.15)

Consequently, Guerrini (2004) researched on the relationship of vocal accuracy, gender, and music aptitude among elementary students and it was shown that the singing of children with high and moderate aptitude were considerably more accurate than the low aptitude children's singing and also the female children's singing was prominently more accurate than the male children's singing.

Music education also has an influence on the self-evaluation and self-efficacy on a child. In a research conducted by Michael P. Hewitt (2015), the findings suggest that between self-efficacy and both music performance and self-evaluation, there was a positive and strong relationship. Likewise, Roy, Devroop & Getz (2014) in a study on South African students, revealed that the music programme which was offered to only one group of students seemed to have an improvement in aspects of attitude and outlook for participants in the band as well as psychosocial benefits.

There is a dearth of Indian research evaluating the striking benefits of Western classical and English popular music education in our country. Therefore, this study explores the various perspectives that possibly exist among children (7 to 12 years old) regarding their western classical and English popular music education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The 40 participants in the study (22 boys and 18 girls) were selected using non-probability purposive/judgmental and snowball sampling techniques. The participants were selected on the basis of the researcher's judgement about which of them would be most useful for the study or most representative. Purposive/judgmental sampling technique was used as the sample was the representative of the population that was studied. Snow ball technique was used to find out more participants, so as to get the needed sample for the study and hence the researcher asked the participants to give referrals of other possible participants

Since the study aimed to find out the perspective of children towards western classical and English popular music education in Mumbai, it was necessary to interview children who attend western music and/or English popular music classes to get accurate information.

Most of the children attended an ICSE system of education (22) while 12 attended the SSC system of education, 4 attended the IB system of education, only one attended a CBSE school and one was home-schooling. The age of the children ranged from 7 years old to 12

years old (Mean = 9.90) while the academic class of the children ranged from second standard to eighth standard. As a number of children start their music education when they are around 4 or 5 years old, some children would have completed two years or more by the age of 7. The researcher wished to have participants up to the age of 12 as post that age; children start preparing for their tenth standard board exams resulting in irregular attendance at their music lessons. The participant had to attend music classes for two years to be eligible to participate in this study as two years gives the child a clearer perspective about their music education and they can state the benefits and the challenges they face in a more convincing manner.

English – speaking children were selected as the researcher was comfortable in this language. All forty children were selected only from Mumbai due to feasibility reasons. The area of residence of the children were South Mumbai (26), Western Suburbs (12), Central (1) and Harbour (1), respectively. Twenty-six children lived in nuclear families while 14 children lived in joint families. The religion backgrounds of the children were Christian (24), Hindu (12), Muslim (2) and Jain (2).

A self-constructed interview schedule was formulated by the researchers in order to obtain the information needed from the children about their western classical and / or popular music education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the total number of children that were interviewed was 40, some children went for more than one music class. Hence, the total number of music classes attended by the children was 52.

Type and location of the music class

Children were asked about the subject of music classes they attended. Most of the children attended piano (n=18) and/or violin music classes (n=16). Out of 52 music classes, 47 were outside the child's residence and only 5 music classes were conducted at the child's residence. The children were asked on how convenient or inconvenient it is for them to travel to their music class/es and reasons for the same. Thirty eight children responded that it is very convenient to travel to their music class/es; music class/es walking distance from home (n=12).

Reasons for attending music classes

All 40 children responded that they like music. When asked for the reasons as to why they like music, 39 responses were emotion-related reasons. One of the main reasons given by the children for choosing their instrument was that they like the sound of the instrument (n=15) and an equal number mentioned that they chose the instrument because of 'inspiration'.

Twenty four children out of the twenty-nine children who went for other classes besides their music class/es, said that they enjoy going for their music class/es the most. Apart from other reasons given by the children for going/attending their music lessons, all the children gave the reason with regards to enhancement of skills in playing one's instrument/s. Similarly, Pitts (2007) points out that there is a clear scale between the adult who takes out time to go to a choir rehearsal or attend a concert and a child who chooses to be a part of the orchestra rather than the football team. Both, the adult and child, respectively, are partaking in music, and acknowledging the influence that it creates to their well-being.

Music Practice Time

Fifteen out of all the 40 children practice for two to four hours a week. Twenty-eight responded that they were satisfied with the amount of time they spent on practicing their musical instrument/vocals. Some of the reasons as to why the children were satisfied with their music practice were that they were able to complete what the teacher assigned them for the week (n=22). Forty-one responses revealed that the children like their music class "very much" and one of the reasons as to why the child likes his/her music class "very much" and looks forward to his/her music class/es was because they learn something new at class (n=32) even though the child may find a new piece challenging. This is revealed in a study conducted by Divecha and Rodrigues (2013), children who attended music classes stated that they have difficulty at the beginning of a new piece and thus have to practice every day as the music teacher always gives the child some amount of work for the week.

Furthermore, apart from a number of the children who participated in this study revealing that they do not go out to play for reasons being either because they do not have friends to play with, too much of school pressure or because of lack of space in the vicinity, 32 out of 40 children responded that their music practice had no effect on their "play time". When the children were interviewed, it was gathered that some of the children consider their music practice as a hobby, recreation and a break from their school work and pressure.

Music Teacher

All 40 children responded that they like their music teacher. Some of the reasons why they like their music teacher were because s/he gets them to play their instrument better (n=22). Thirty-seven stated that they like their music teacher's qualities. Also, Creech and Hallam (2000) pointed out to the need for further research that addresses the question of how interpersonal relationships has an impact upon each member of the learning partnership amongst parents, professionals and pupils.

Thirty-nine responded that there was no aspect that they disliked about their music teacher at the class/es they attended while 13 stated otherwise. When asked what they disliked about their music teacher, 7 mentioned that their music teacher shouts at them because they don't practice. Nonetheless, there is no alternative than to 'practice' one's music to overcome a challenging piece of work and enhanced progress in instrumental playing. Similarly, Nielsen (2001) indicated that through music practice the students develop an extensive self-regulatory skill that allowed them to enhance their learning and performances taking into consideration intrapersonal, interpersonal and contextual conditions. The students outlined specific goals, used self-instruction, focused on strategic planning and examined themselves selectively at a detailed level.

Teaching method/s used

Children were also asked about the teaching methods used in their music classes. In 23 out of the 52 music classes, the music teacher made them clap out the rhythm of any piece or study that they worked on. In 22 classes, a metronome was used. A metronome is a device that helps the child in keeping time while playing their instrument.

When the children were asked whether they like the teaching methods used at the music class/es they attended, 32 responded that they like the method/s 'a lot' while 20 found it 'fairly'. Out of the 32 who responded "a lot", 20 mentioned that the teacher makes learning easy. None of the children responded "not at all", in spite of it being an option in the questionnaire.

Furthermore, some of the children were bored of the instrument they were playing and hence wanted to give up on their music education. Subsequently, when the children were asked for suggestions for teaching methods, the children suggested that they would like to be introduced to various instruments apart from the one they were currently learning from their music teacher. Also, some children stated that they would like their music teachers to teach

them other songs apart from the music syllabus as the pieces from the music syllabus sometimes got monotonous and boring for the child to keep playing and practising.

Music Examinations

Twenty two out of 40 children appeared for music examinations. The children were then asked about their opinion towards music examinations. The responses obtained from the children who appeared for music examinations were positive (n=22), negative (n=3) and neutral (n=1), respectively. The children who did not appear for any music examinations were also asked for their opinion towards music examinations. The music class/es the participants of the study appeared for were violin, piano, vocals, guitar and theory of music from the boards of Trinity College, London and / or Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London.

The children stated that music examinations make him/her practice a lot more. Consequently, as the child practices more when s/he has to prepare for a music examination, the child's expertise and level in instrument playing develops and is enhanced successfully.

Importance given to music education

Twenty nine out of 40 children responded that they would encourage their friends to attend music class/es. When the children were asked how important music education is to them, 23 responded very important, 14 mentioned important and 3 stated not so important.

Twenty-two children responded that it was a good idea to have music education as a graded subject in the (State Secondary Certificate) SSC board examination, especially beneficial for musically-inclined children. All 40 children responded positively and multiple reasons were obtained. Subsequently, in a study conducted by Saunders and Baker (1991), classroom teacher in schools ranked music first as a supplement to other curricular areas among useful skills and understandings.

Benefits

All the children mentioned that their music class/es have helped them in various ways. When children were asked whether they had good personal experience/s with regards to their music education, all 40 children responded 'yes'. Thirty-three were music-oriented reasons and 24 were other reasons/experiences. The children shared the way/s in which their music classes helped them. Twenty-six mentioned that they are more musical in their playing while there were 25 cognitive-related responses like they are able to concentrate better (n=15) and

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has helped in mathematics (n=5) amongst other reasons. Also, under personal-related responses was that their confidence is boosted (n=12). Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1997) stated that when a challenging score is performed by a skilled pianist, s/he is drawn into a more complex and involving relationship. Due to the novelty of the score, the reach is not easy and demands for careful attention. However, “*the automaticity of existing skills provides confidence, structure, integrity, and a foundation from which the new material can be reached.*” (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1997).

The findings of this study revealed that the children, parents and music teachers shared multiple benefits and several way/s experienced after having attended music classes. One of the ways in which the music class/es benefited the child was that the child’s creativity has developed and enhanced to a great extent. Furthermore, Gardner (1997) mentioned that if various notations or other mnemonics are transmitted effectively to the students, can be tremendous aids to musical memory, assuming the various notations and other mnemonics capture crucial aspects of a desired performance.

Challenges faced with regards to their music education

When children were asked about their challenge on whether school work affects their music practice time, in particular, 25 responded that school work did not affect his/her music practice time. The children were questioned whether their music practice has an effect on their ‘play time’. Thirty two responded saying “no effect”. Those children, who go out to play, have enough of time to play and enough of time for their music practice. Besides, Neelly (2001) discussed how adults nurture powerful learning connections in young children by introducing music in their routines.

Twenty-three responses revealed that there was “no pain” experienced in the initial stages of the music lessons. When the children were asked whether they feel their parent’s support in their music education, all 40 children responded “yes”. Twenty-five children responded “yes” and 15 out of 40 children responded “no” that there are no difficulties/challenges with regards to their music education. Responses on whether the child has ever thought of giving up on their music class/es and reasons for the same revealed that 33 children have never thought about giving up on their instrument/music education. Some of the children were bored of the instrument they were playing and hence wanted to give up on their music education. Accordingly, when the children were asked for suggestions for teaching methods, the children suggested that they would like to be introduced to various

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instruments apart from the one they were currently learning from their music teacher. Also, some children stated that they would like their music teachers to teach them other songs apart from the music syllabus as the pieces from the music syllabus sometimes got monotonous and boring for them to keep playing and practising.

Twelve out of 40 children said that they did encounter a bad personal experience/s with regards to their music education while 28 responded otherwise. The bad personal experience being that the teacher shouted at him/her because s/he did not practice. Consequently, when the child does not practice adequately, his/her musical progress is delayed. However, McPherson (2005) highlighted the importance of helping students when performing challenging tasks on their instrument to develop a repertoire of task-appropriate strategies that will enable the student to think musically.

Suggestions given by the children

Children were finally asked for suggestions about some teaching methods/styles that could be incorporated in their music lessons. Six out of 40 children suggested that they would like to be introduced to other instruments (apart from the instrument being learned) amongst other suggestions given by the children.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this explorative study indicate the reason and benefits of western classical and/or English popular music education. Even though children face challenges in Western classical and/or English popular music education, they still feel the need for music education. This study also provides several suggestions about teaching methods that the children would like to have incorporated in their music class/es. Also, the findings of this study found that most of the children's music class/es enhanced their confidence, concentration and developed their mathematical abilities.

However, this study was not done to compete with the benefits of any other forms of art. This study was conducted to enlighten us with the influence and benefits that western classical and/or English popular music education can have on children (7 to 12 years old).

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