



## Analysis of Applicability of the Suzuki Method in Zimbabwean Music Education: A Case of Primary Schools in Masvingo Urban

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### Abstract

This study sought to analyze applicability of the Suzuki method in Zimbabwean music education. Applicability of the Suzuki method in an African context seems a mammoth task as some of the concepts are not in line with the African cultural norms. The method is based on the central view that early music education of children should involve parents and that it requires a conducive learning environment. The study adopted a qualitative approach and case study design, which focused on selected primary schools in Masvingo urban. The population of this study was made up of school administrators, teachers, music students and parents from selected schools. The sample of this study comprised two music teachers, two administrators and twenty students from each school. In this study the researcher used random sampling and the following instruments were employed to solicit data: questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. Respondents revealed that the Suzuki method was difficult to implement in most Zimbabwean schools and that both teachers and parents were not aware of the method. They also indicated that children from affluent families benefited from the method more than those in high density schools. Problems such as limited time, inadequate teaching and learning materials as well as inappropriate methodology were mentioned as major challenges. The study concluded that teachers in schools under study implemented the Suzuki method unawares. It was therefore recommended that teachers and school heads be encouraged to work together to promote the effective implementation of the Suzuki method. This could be enhanced through workshops involving stakeholders.

**Key words:** Music education, Suzuki method, Primary music education, Rote learning, Music educators, Philosophy of music

### Introduction

The Suzuki method was established by Dr Sinichi Suzuki. It is relevant to the teaching of music education at primary school level in Zimbabwe. It seems teachers apply the method without enough philosophy of music education. The relevance of the method is noted in the way it develops the lives and moral character of primary schools pupils. Suzuki's major approach is based on the belief that, 'all children can be educated in music'. The general view is based on the fact that primary school pupils perform well in music at school if a similar environment is created at home. Therefore, the main thrust of this study was to analyze the applicability of the Suzuki method in the Zimbabwean context.

### Background of the Study

There are a number of music teaching methods which were developed soon after the World War II and during the twentieth century. Some of the philosophies which were popular during this period were championed by renowned music educators such as; Emile Jaques-Dacroze, Shinichi Suzuki, Zoltan Kodaly, Carl Orff, John Paynter and Keith Swanwick. Dalcroze's philosophy of eurhythmics, solfege and improvisation was found during the twentieth century. His philosophy emphasized movement as the most important aspect of music and that theory should follow practice (Mead: 1994). Zoltan Kodaly also established relevant basic principles of music education. Kodaly's philosophy is based on singing. He argues that singing has to be taught from an early age for it to be learnt effectively. He believes that singing is the foundation of musicianship and traditional folk songs need to be taught in the learner's mother tongue. The major contribution of his philosophy to this study is that, his argument of using songs in the mother tongue ties well with one central philosophy of the Suzuki method which is also echoed by Piaget in his theory of child development, which is one of the theories that anchored this study (Choksy:1981).

It can be noted that most of Suzuki's ideas concur with the views of prominent music educators such as Kodaly and Dacroze mentioned above, who emphasized the teaching of music concepts from known to unknown and simple to difficult concepts. However, the main gap between Suzuki's philosophy and that of other music educators is that the application of Suzuki method emphasizes the significance of a favorable learning environment to children and that both parents and teachers have to play a crucial role in the child's learning of music.

Suzuki principles highlight that, the student, parent and teacher provide a solid foundation of a learning triangle. In this triangle, the parent is expected to attend lessons at school, create a positive home learning environment and organizes daily listening and practice sessions. Moreover, parents are expected to love musical instruments of their children as well as being able to play them. Nye et al (1991:30) supports this when they aver that, "Children need encouragement, acceptance and positive reinforcement from both teachers and other peers". Campbell (2008: 116) concurs with the same views when he says that, "The adults transmit concepts, including music to the child and participate in the child's discovery and manipulation of music". Suzuki's ideal environment includes love, high-quality praise, role training and repetition. Therefore, the method is based on the principle that all children possess the ability to learn music, which can be developed and enhanced through a nurturing environment.

The place of Suzuki philosophy in an African context is rather complex as some of the principles of his methods are farfetched. Early African education at primary level is characterized by principles of both informal and formal education. In most cases the early years of an African child are dominated by informal education where the musical aspect of learning is primarily encompassed in games, songs, folktales and other activities which normally take place in the community. It is at this stage that children below the age of five learn a lot of musical skills through rote method. Gelfand (1979: 11) highlights that, "The child's reasoning powers are developed through learning proverbs, riddles, playing games, listening to stories..." It is through these activities that an African child is well prepared musically before he/she ushers into primary education. Oliver Mutukudzi in an interview with the Sunday Mail of 16-07-12 had this to say, "...my mother tells me that my birth cry was the best composition ever". This assertion further reiterates the strong musical background that characterizes the early life of an African child, which is not accommodated in the Suzuki method. The method is silent on the crucial role of African informal education and the philosophy is based on the instruction of quite a number of Western instruments such as the violin, guitar and keyboard, which are rarely taught in most African schools, especially in Zimbabwe and particularly the area under study. The Zimbabwean music syllabus and the Nziramasanga Commission of 1999 emphasize the learning of traditional music where instruments such as *marimba*, *mbira* and *ngoma* (drum) are prioritized (Munyaradzi, 2014). Therefore, the focus of this study was to give an analysis of the applicability of the Suzuki method in the Zimbabwean primary school music education.

### Statement of the Problem

The research problem addressed in this study indicates that most teachers in schools do not understand the Suzuki method and that they lack the best skills in the teaching of music at primary level. Music as a subject is not given adequate time in the school curriculum as it is often overshadowed by academic subjects such as Mathematics and English. Mugochi (1988) avers that, "a battle has to be fought to place music properly on the school timetable throughout the country". This is the current state of affairs in most primary schools and if this situation continues the application of the Suzuki method will be compromised. Therefore, the study seeks to conscientize music teachers on the relevance of the application of the Suzuki method in Zimbabwean primary schools.

### Purpose of the Study

The study sought to improve teachers' knowledge of the Suzuki method of teaching music education at primary level. It sought to bring about new methods of teaching music. In addition, the study sought to expose Zimbabwean music teachers to different types of music instruction found in Zimbabwe and other African countries. This study sought to assess the importance of the Suzuki method and philosophies of other music educators such as Kodaly and Dacroze. Finally, the study sought to bring about ways through which the implementation of some concepts of the Suzuki method which can be used in the Zimbabwean context.

### Research Objectives

This study seeks to:

- Assess the application of the Suzuki method in the Zimbabwean primary school education.
- Evaluate impact of parental involvement in student performance.

### Research questions

- How is the Suzuki method of teaching music applied in the Zimbabwean primary schools?
- What impact does parental involvement have on student performance in music education at primary level?

### Assumption of the study

The study made the following assumptions:

- Primary music teachers are accidentally using the Suzuki method in schools.
- The Suzuki method is not fully implemented in most primary schools.
- Parents are not fully involved in the teaching and learning of their children in music education (Epstein's Model).
- Currently schools do not have adequate resources to support the implementation of the Suzuki method.
- Attitude of school administrators towards Music subject is negative.

### Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by Piaget's Cognitive-development theory which states that children actively construct knowledge by exploring and manipulating the world around them (Wood, Smith and Grossniklaus, 2001). Piaget believes that children pass through four distinct stages as they grow. These stages of cognitive development include the following: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational (Slavin: 1988). They correspond with the age of the child. Hence, the theory as applied to this study illuminates the ideas of Suzuki about the child's development through teacher, parental and environmental support in learning music.

The study is further aided by Epstein's theory of Parental Involvement. Epstein (2001) suggests that parents who are informed and involved in their children's education can positively influence their attitude and performance. Here is

Epstein's model of parental involvement:

Epstein's Model for Parental Involvement

- *Parenting*. Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.

- *Communicating*. Communicate with families about school programs and student progress. Create two-way communication channels between school and home.
  - *Volunteering*. Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school.
  - *Learning at Home*. Involve families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks.
  - *Decision-Making*. Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations.
  - *Collaborating with the Community*. Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities.
- Epstein's model above shows that there is adequate support from parents which enhances meaningful teaching learning of music education at primary level.

## Literature Review

### Application of the Suzuki method

Suzuki's "Mother Tongue" approach to teaching music anchors on the principles of language acquisition. Learning music involves an early beginning, listening, love, parental assistance, and constant repetition, learning with other children and learning to read. Pupils start at pre-school age. This is where the child is given an instrument suitable for his/her musical ability (Moyo: 1995). This process involves teacher and parental support to nurture them in the particular instrument. As a result, parents are encouraged to attend the children's lessons to enable supervision of the instrument. The parent nurtures the pupil as he/she progresses until they gain confidence and the skills to play the instrument (Brewer: 1995).

In the schools under study, there were few musical instruments in the classrooms which limited possession of instruments by individual pupils. In addition, the parents could not afford the instruments at home. This defeats Suzuki's concept because in the first place the pupils should have an instrument for him or herself for the teacher and parent to assist (Munyaradzi: 2014).

According to Suzuki, pupils need to take regular group lessons. This is normally the case in many schools in Zimbabwe where there are few instruments which allow pupils to work in groups. Teachers bring pupils together to teach them skills in playing instruments. They give them chances to practise the instruments (Suzuki: 1968). However, pupils do not have adequate practice due to the large numbers of classes. The teacher cannot attend to individual pupils due to the same reason (Stebbing: 1999).

### Parental involvement

A good number of studies attribute student achievement to parental involvement (Henderson and Berla, 1994). This is because parents can make a follow up on homework which helps in completion of the work, improved school attendance, positive attitude and greater participation in education. Epstein concurs with Henderson and Berla that parents' involvement can contribute to these outcomes from early childhood through high school. Studies by Stegeline (2002) and Wirtz & Schumacher (2003) among others looked at early childhood education and literacy, linking between families who do literacy activities at home and their children's success with their education. Parental involvement is enhanced by the teacher. West (2000) reports that the teacher's efforts increase parent-teacher communication, and aids on pupils' success in education. Parent-teacher communication motivates pupils to complete their homework. This demonstrates the importance of teachers initiating positive contact with parents, and the potential effect it can have on students' achievement in school.

Although parental involvement is a key factor in improving pupils' education in music, the problem of inadequate instruments and attitude towards the subject are some of the limitations in implementing the Suzuki method in music education (Mugochi, 1988 and Drake, 2000). Administrators are also to blame for favouring examinable academic subjects such as English and Mathematics (Munyaradzi and Maushe, 2014).

## Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to different ways that can be used to gather and analyze data. Shastri (2008) defined methodology as the use of suitable approaches and techniques to extract relevant data, which when analyzed helps to draw time references from specific phenomena. The study employed a qualitative paradigm as this gave the researcher an opportunity to look at various aspects of the study in their natural settings.

### Population and sample

A population refers to any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common, that are of interest to the researcher. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) define population as a group of people which is of interest to the researcher to generalize the results of the study. For these study administrators, teachers, music students and parents of selected schools in Masvingo urban made up the population. The sample of this study was made up of two music teachers, two administrators and twenty students from each school.

### Sampling procedure

In this study the researcher used random sampling. Random sampling enables every member of the group to have an equal chance of being selected. In random sampling every element has an equal part of being selected for research purposes (Shastri: 2008).

### Data collection and instruments

Data collection refers to acquiring of data in order to verify gathered facts. Kombo and Tromp (2006: 99) aver that, "In research, the term data collection refers to gathering specific information aimed at proving or refuting some facts". Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) aver that, research instruments include tests, interviews, questionnaires, observation and review of documents. Chiromo (2006) asserts that research instruments are tools used to collect data that would help to answer research questions. For the purpose of this study, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were employed by the researcher. Questionnaires were distributed to administrators, teachers and pupils, and face to face interviews were done to the same subjects. Parents were also interviewed and an analysis of documents such as schemes of work, music syllabus and other relevant music education documents was carried out.

### Findings

- The way musical skills are acquired is the same as language acquisition in that pupils imitate what they hear and practice it.
- The environment (both home and school) helps the pupil to gain skills in music. This means that the parent in conjunction with the teacher assist the pupil to practice playing instruments.
- The teacher, the parent and the pupil all contribute to the pupil's success in learning in music education.
- Parental involvement influences pupils' learning of music. It increases pupils' attitude towards practice of musical instruments, completion of homework and school attendance.
- Parental involvement improves dialogue between teachers and parents which enhances pupils' performance in music education.
- Pupils from affluent families benefit more than those from poor families because they have the musical instruments at home and they use them at school as well.

### Discussion

Epstein et al (2002) came up with some relevant conclusions regarding parental involvement. Parental involvement tends to be affected by change of grades. As children move up the ladder, parents' interests decline. One of the reasons for this decline is the parents' lack of familiarity with the school curriculum. It is evident that wealthy parents tend to be involved in education more often and in a positive manner. Poor parents have place little value on education which negatively affects pupils' achievement or behavior. Schools situated in high density suburbs and that work on building relationships with all parents can balance the involvement of all socio-economic groups. High density primary schools such as Rujeko, Runyararo, Vurombo and Shakashe find it difficult to implement the Suzuki method because of quite a number of factors. Some of the factors that negatively impact on the proper application of the Suzuki method include attitude of administrators towards Music subject, shortage of resources, generation gap, lack of parents' interest, shortage of time and mistrust between teachers and parents (Mugochi: 1988 & Campbell: 2008). Finally, single parents, employed parents and parents who live far from the school, on average, are less involved in the school unless the school organizes opportunities that consider these parents' needs and circumstances. Although these patterns are generally observable among schools, they can be overcome if schools develop programs that involve parents. Moreover, the impact of some of the remnants of the colonial education is still hounding successful application of relevant Music education methods such as the Suzuki method. The Zoning system discussed by Mupondi and Munyaradzi (2013) in their study creates a gap between schools in some sections of Masvingo urban. Primary Schools such as Helen McGhee and Victoria are situated in town, hence are often rated high which resulted in scramble for places in those schools and affluent families always enjoyed the lion's share when it comes to places. The implementation of the Suzuki method is to a lesser extent successful in affluent schools and greatly unsuccessful in high density schools. This owes to inadequate teaching and learning materials coupled with little parental involvement in high density schools.

### Conclusion

The analysis has examined the applicability of the Suzuki method in Zimbabwean primary schools particularly those in Masvingo urban. The study noted numerous limitations in the implementation of the method. These include inadequacy of teaching and learning materials and lack of meaningful parental involvement in all schools. Large classes are also a barrier to meaningful individual assistance especially in music education where a pupil has to learn a different musical instrument. Teachers in schools under study implemented the Suzuki method unawares. Therefore, the implementation of the Suzuki method is to a lesser extent successful in affluent schools and greatly unsuccessful in high density schools.

### Recommendations

- Teachers are encouraged to assist parents understand their role in their children's education.
- Teachers have to build strong relationships with parents to help shape the child's academic performance and behavior.
- Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with parents and pupils themselves to achieve the proper and meaningful communication and success of the child.
- It would be helpful if schools buy adequate musical instruments/equipment so that each pupil could have access to them.
- School heads are encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards music education.
- Parents need to buy their children all the requirements in music education for success.
- Classes for music education could be streamlined to allow attention to individual pupils by teachers for meaningful teaching and learning.

- Each school year, provide parents with the opportunity to learn how to support, encourage and help their student at home.
- There is need for teachers to communicate to parents what pupils would learn in the subject.

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