Blended Teaching and Learning of Music: Exploring the Challenges and Opportunities in South African Higher Education

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Abstract

South Africa boasts a history of a rich and diverse musical heritage, which is a reflection of its multicultural society. Efforts to promote and develop music education in the country have evolved over the years. Following the advent of democracy in 1994, the South African government recognised the significance of arts and culture, including music, in the education system. Various initiatives were introduced to support and enhance music education in schools and communities, which mark a pivotal moment in the acknowledgment of the cultural importance of music. In the post-1994 era, the democratic government's commitment to fostering a vibrant cultural landscape extended to music education, aiming to provide accessible opportunities for learners. This recognition of the value of arts and culture contributed to the cultivation of a diverse and inclusive musical environment. Despite these positive developments, challenges and opportunities emerge in the realm of higher education, particularly with the integration of blended teaching and learning of music. This study, using a qualitative methodology under the descriptive phenomenology design, explores these dynamics. Six participants engage in the study. Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis, employing the seven-step method, is used to extract meaningful insights. The findings of the study showcase progress in the representation of diverse musical genres and cultural traditions in the curriculum. However, the study also reveals areas for improvement, especially regarding fully integrating the music of marginalised communities and ensuring a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. In conclusion, this comprehensive exploration illuminates the intricate dynamics in the realm of music education in South African higher education.

Keywords: blended learning, music education, South African higher education, inclusivity, cultural diversity

Introduction

It is important to mention that South Africa boasts a history of music education that is deeply rooted in diverse cultural traditions, which contribute to its rich tapestry of musical expression (De Villiers 2015; Netshivhambe 2023; Yende and Madolo 2023). However, this history also prompts a critical examination of how music education can adapt to meet the demands of the digital age. Several scholars agree that the integration of online elements into traditional music instruction holds significant potential for enhancing accessibility, fostering collaboration and expanding the reach of music education to a broader audience (Gorgoretti 2019; Gouzouasis and Bakan 2011). Nevertheless, this transition to blended learning in the South African higher education system is not without its challenges. This view is supported by Yende and Madolo (2023) who mention that blending traditional and online methods in music education in the context of South African higher education presents a dynamic and promising approach laden with unique challenges. In a world where technology continually evolves, the intersection of digital tools and music pedagogy provides an intriguing landscape for exploration (Gorgoretti 2019; Gouzouasis and Bakan 2011; Yende 2023).

According to Yende and Madolo (2023), benefits in incorporating online elements into music education are multifaceted. These benefits include increasing accessibility which stands out as a notable advantage, as digital tools can facilitate learning beyond the constraints of physical classrooms (Gorgoretti 2019; Gouzouasis and Bakan 2011). Students from various geographical locations can engage with music education, breaking down barriers that traditional methods may impose (Yende and Madolo 2023). The collaborative nature of music creation aligns seamlessly with online platforms, enabling students to connect and create together irrespective of their physical locations. The expansion of music education into the digital realm therefore also holds promise for broadening the reach of musical styles and cultural influences. South Africa's musical landscape is incredibly diverse, which reflects the country's multifaceted heritage. Integrating online components allows for the exploration and appreciation of various genres, styles and cultural expressions, which contribute to a more inclusive and comprehensive music education experience (Yende 2023; Yende and Madolo 2023).

Several studies such as those by Varvarigou and Creech (2021) and Yende (2023) mention that the implementation of blended learning in South African higher education poses several challenges. Infrastructure limitations, particularly in remote areas, may hinder seamless access to online resources. Socio-economic factors could exacerbate disparities in access, potentially excluding certain demographics from the benefits of blended music education. Dealing with these issues requires strategic planning, investment in technology infrastructure and a commitment to equity in education (Yende and Madolo 2023). According to Kigozi (2008), cultural considerations also play a significant role in the successful integration of online elements into traditional music education. South Africa's rich cultural tapestry necessitates a careful approach to ensure that digital tools complement, rather than overshadow, traditional teaching

methods. Balancing the preservation of cultural authenticity with the embrace of technological advancements is a delicate task that requires collaboration between educators, musicians and technologists (Cain et al. 2013). The assessment and evaluation of musical performance in a blended learning environment present unique challenges. Traditional music education often relies on in-person evaluations, where nuances of expression and group dynamics are readily observable. Adapting these assessment methods to an online format requires innovative approaches to capture the essence of musical proficiency and collaboration accurately (Yende and Madolo 2023).

It is understood that a thorough examination of existing literature reveals a multifaceted landscape concerning blended teaching and learning of music. International studies underscore the positive impact of technology integration, citing increased student engagement, personalised learning experiences, and the development of critical digital skills. However, such findings may not seamlessly translate to the South African context, given the unique socio-economic factors and infrastructure disparities.

In the South African context, limited access to technology, varying levels of digital literacy and socio-economic inequalities emerge as crucial considerations. The study by Yende and Madolo (2023) emphasises the importance of dealing with these contextual factors to ensure the successful implementation of blended learning in music education. The literature highlights the need for a culturally responsive approach, considering the diverse musical traditions that shape South Africa's rich musical tapestry.

While studies such as those by Gorgoretti (2019 and Gouzouasis and Bakan (2011) focus on the benefits of technology in music education, Yende and Madolo (2023) caution against overlooking potential drawbacks. Yende and Madolo (2023) further mention that issues such as the loss of hands-on experience, challenges in assessing practical skills online, and the need for specialised technology training for educators emerge as critical points of discussion. Understanding these nuances is essential for devising effective strategies that align with the unique dynamics of music education in South African higher institutions (Varvarigou and Creech 2021; Yende 2023).

Despite the existing body of literature, significant gaps persist in our understanding of the specific challenges and opportunities associated with blended teaching and learning of music in South African higher education. This article seeks to bridge these gaps by providing a nuanced exploration of the contextual factors that shape the implementation of blended learning in the South African music education landscape.

The motivation for this article stems from the recognition that addressing these gaps is essential for advancing music education in South Africa. By gaining insights into the challenges and opportunities specific to this context, educators, policymakers and researchers can collaboratively develop strategies that foster inclusive, culturally responsive and effective blended music education programmes. This article aspires to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the future of music education in South Africa, by

providing a foundation for informed decision-making and innovative practices in higher education.

Research Questions

For this article, the researcher developed the following three primary questions which sought answers that would clarify the ongoing crisis:

- How do you perceive the current state of inclusivity and diversity in the music education curriculum?

- In your experience, what challenges do underprivileged and marginalised students typically face in accessing high-quality music education?

- How do you think socio-economic factors have an impact on students' ability to fully engage in and benefit from music education programmes?

Theoretical Framework

The community of inquiry (CoI) model, developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer in 2000, has become a widely used framework in the realms of online and blended learning. Comprising three fundamental elements, namely, the cognitive presence, the social presence and the teaching presence, the model serves as a guide to cultivate a meaningful and engaging learning experience (Garrison et al. 2000). In the context of blended teaching and learning of music in South African higher education, the CoI model offers a structured approach to understanding the dynamics of this innovative educational setting (Harb and Krish 2020). Regarding cognitive presence, the application involves a thorough exploration of how blended learning elevates cognitive engagement in music education. This includes an analysis of how online components contribute to critical thinking, problem-solving and the development of musical skills. The significance lies in investigating how the integration of technology enhances cognitive activities such as music analysis, composition and creative expression.

With regard to social presence, the model encourages an examination of both online and offline interactions in creating a sense of community among music students. This application extends to assessing the impact of blended learning on collaborative music-making, peer feedback and community building (Weidlich and Bastiaens 2017). The significance of this lies in understanding how social presence influences motivation, a sense of belonging, and overall student satisfaction in blended music education programmes. Turning to teaching presence, the CoI model facilitates an analysis of the role of instructors in designing, facilitating and assessing blended music courses (Richardson et al. 2015). This application involves investigating how teaching presence is maintained in both online and face-to-face components. Significantly, researchers can explore the strategies employed by instructors to support diverse learners, address technological challenges and create a supportive learning environment.

The advantages of the CoI model in the context of blended teaching and learning of music are manifold. Its holistic approach considers cognitive, social and teaching aspects of the learning experience. Its adaptability allows for application in various educational contexts, making it particularly suitable for examining blended learning in the unique landscape of South African higher education. In conclusion, the CoI model stands as a robust and versatile theoretical framework, adeptly aligning with the complexities inherent in blended teaching and learning of music. It provides a nuanced lens through which researchers can explore the challenges and opportunities in the distinctive landscape of South African higher education.

Research Methodology

In the pursuit of a comprehensive exploration of blended teaching and learning of music in the South African higher education context, this research article employed a qualitative methodology under the descriptive phenomenology design. The justification for selecting descriptive phenomenology design was that it helped the researcher to understand and explain the experiences of the research participants as they give an account of their experiences (Shosha 2012; Sundler et al. 2019). All participants were music lecturers in the four selected South African universities who had experience with blended teaching and learning. These participants were selected using the snowball sampling procedure. This procedure was appropriate because these participants were located in rural-based universities and the only means of contacting them was through the assistance of other research participants. Upon reaching the participants via mobile phone calls and emails, they were briefed about the purpose of the study and their consent was sought before the interviews. The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide comprising a list of prepared questions related to the research questions to conduct the interviews (Beck 2013). The instrument was prepared based on recurring themes in the extant literature and was screened for accuracy and validity by a researcher. This allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions to ensure the participants give their broad perspectives about the topic of the study. Interviews allow a researcher to probe and get an in-depth meaning of the feelings, perceptions and attitudes of participants.

The target population consisted of four South African universities based in the rural provinces of the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal. Six participants participated in this study. According to Beck (2013), phenomenologically, three to 10 participants are good participants for research purposes. The rationale behind employing these sampling designs was rooted in their perceived convenience and essential fit for both the participants and the researcher, aligning with Creswell's (2009) phenomenological guidance.

Geographically, this study spanned the three South African provinces of Limpopo, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, which were selected purposefully owing to the presence of rural-based universities that prioritise music education. The choice of

institutions in these provinces was predicated on the feasibility of conducting an in-depth examination of the blended teaching and learning landscape. In the participant identification process, emphasis was placed on selecting individuals with substantial and pertinent expertise in blended music education. Before the interviews, the participants were provided with a comprehensive briefing outlining the nature and purpose of the study, and explicit consent was obtained.

The researcher employed a triangulation approach. Triangulation is a vital methodological strategy aimed at validating and cross-examining the data, which effectively mitigates potential criticisms and debates concerning bias, singularity and subjective observational research. By employing multiple data collection methods or sources, such as interviews, observations and document analysis, the researcher aimed to converge on a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the blended teaching and learning of music in South African higher education. This triangulation approach not only strengthens the credibility of the findings but also deals with the potential limitations inherent in relying on a single method or perspective. It contributes to the robustness and reliability of the study, fostering a more nuanced and well-rounded interpretation of the complexities in the researched phenomenon.

The data analysis phase began promptly after the transcription of interviews. For a robust and rigorous analysis, Colaizzi's phenomenological data analysis, which employs the seven-step method, was chosen. This method was selected for its reputation in ensuring the trustworthiness, credibility and reliability of the study findings (Beck et al. 1994; Colaizzi 1978). Colaizzi's process for phenomenological data analysis was adopted for this study. Throughout the study, particular attention was given to safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. To this end, numbers were used instead of the participants' initials (for example, Participant 1, Participant 2) in reporting findings, which ensured anonymity and confidentiality. Simultaneously, thematic analysis was incorporated to facilitate the presentation of findings in a coherent and meaningful manner (Beck et al. 1994). The culmination of the research findings was presented through the interpretation of emergent themes, supported by relevant quotations from the participants. This approach offered a rich and contextually grounded understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with blended teaching and learning of music in South African higher education. In essence, this research methodology not only navigated the complexities of the chosen research landscape but also upheld ethical considerations and methodological rigour in the pursuit of nuanced insights.

Findings

Perhaps it is prudent to foreground this section by mentioning that in the realm of blended teaching and learning of music in South African higher education, the results and findings of this article offer a compelling narrative that unravels the intricacies and nuances of the educational landscape. This section unveils the outcomes of the article.

It presents the key themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis of the participants' experiences and perspectives. These findings not only reflect the unique challenges and opportunities faced by music lecturers but also contribute to a broader understanding of the implications for effective blended music education. As we delve into the results, we embark on a journey to uncover the voices and insights that shape the landscape of music education in the evolving context of South African higher education.

This study's findings revealed common themes that emerged from the three research questions. These findings were supplemented by scholarly literary writings. The findings were divided into three significant sections, namely, (1) the current state of inclusivity and diversity in the music education curriculum; (2) challenges that underprivileged students face in accessing high-quality music education; and (3) socio-economic factors that have an impact on students' ability to fully engage in music education programmes. The findings addressed the study questions, while the sub-aims were developed according to the literature gathered in the study.

Current State of Inclusivity and Diversity in the Music Education Curriculum

In this study, most participants believed that there has been notable progress in recent years. They highlighted that there are more representation of diverse musical genres and cultural traditions in the curriculum such as the marimba, African drums and the thumb piano. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in incorporating the music of marginalised communities and ensuring a more inclusive approach.

> There's been a commendable effort to diversify the curriculum, acknowledging the rich tapestry of musical heritage. Still, we need to address the gaps in representation and make a conscious effort to integrate more global perspectives, ensuring students are exposed to a truly comprehensive music education. (Participant 1)

> Inclusivity goes beyond just including diverse genres. We need to ensure our educators are culturally competent and can effectively teach the music of various communities. It's not just about what's in the curriculum but how it's taught that matters. (Participant 2)

> Frankly, I think there's much work to be done. The current curriculum tends to favour Western classical music, and while we've made strides in introducing other genres, there's a long way to go. We need a more balanced and representative curriculum that reflects the diverse musical landscape. (Participant 3)

> In my experience, there's been a push to include more local and indigenous music in the curriculum. It's crucial for students to connect with their own cultural heritage. However, we should also be cautious not to tokenise or oversimplify these contributions. (Participant 4)

Certain genres and communities are still underrepresented. We should actively seek out and include music from underrepresented groups, ensuring a fair and comprehensive representation that reflects the true diversity of our musical world. (Participant 5)

I have been advocating for a more inclusive curriculum for years. It's not just about adding diverse genres as footnotes; it's about rethinking the entire approach to music education. We need to challenge our assumptions and broaden our perspectives. (Participant 6)

The participants acknowledged progress in music education's diversity, which align with existing literature and emphasise the importance of inclusive curricula (Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 1's call for more global perspectives echoes studies advocating comprehensive music education. Participant 2's emphasis on educator cultural competence resonates with research underlining the role of teaching methods in fostering inclusivity (De Villiers 2015; Yende 2023). Participant 3's concern about Western classical bias aligns with literature critiquing imbalances in music education content (Yende 2023). Participant 4's caution against tokenisation corresponds with discussions on the risk of cultural appropriation in music education (De Villiers 2015; Netshivhambe 2023; Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 5's call to actively seek underrepresented music aligns with studies urging intentional efforts for diversity (Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 6's advocacy for a holistic rethink reflects literature urging a paradigm shift in music education.

Challenges that Underprivileged Students Face in Accessing High-Quality Music Education

The participants in this study agreed that limited financial resources often restrict underprivileged students from affording instruments, lessons or other essential materials for a comprehensive music education.

Student preparation for postsecondary education is limited by the small number of schools that offer music as a subject. It is difficult to give students a high-quality education when there is limited access to university auditoriums for exam concerts, large practice spaces and welcoming halls. Off-campus student housing presents a problem because it prevents students from practicing and rehearsing on the weekends and in the evenings. These conditions exacerbate achievement gaps and sustain educational inequalities. They also disproportionately impact students from particular backgrounds, increasing the likelihood of failure and expulsion. (Participant 1)

Unequal distribution of educational resources can result in underfunded schools, lacking proper facilities and qualified music instructors, further hindering access to quality music education. (Participant 2)

Lack of exposure to diverse musical genres and cultural influences can limit the breadth of underprivileged students' musical experiences, impacting their overall development as musicians. (Participant 3)

Insufficient community support may contribute to a lack of extracurricular opportunities, such as music ensembles or performances, limiting students' chances to enhance their skills and passion for music. (Participant 4)

Limited access to technology and online resources can impede underprivileged students from leveraging digital platforms for learning and collaboration, putting them at a disadvantage in today's tech-driven music landscape. (Participant 5)

Social and cultural stigmas may discourage underprivileged students from pursuing music education, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and limiting their chances to explore and excel in this artistic field. (Participant 6)

While the participants in this study provided firsthand insights, their perspectives are consistent with existing literature, which highlights the pervasive barrier of limited financial resources for underprivileged students seeking comprehensive music education (Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 1's emphasis on the impact of inadequate facilities and scarcity of schools offering music aligns with research that identifies such conditions as contributors to widening achievement gaps and sustaining educational inequalities (Yende and Madolo 2023).

Participant 2's observation regarding the unequal distribution of educational resources echoes findings in the literature that discuss how underfunded schools with insufficient facilities and qualified instructors hinder the attainment of quality music education (De Villiers 2015; Shi and Sercombe 2020). Participant 3's statement on the limitation of musical breadth because of a lack of exposure to diverse genres corresponds with research emphasising the role of varied musical experiences in overall musician development.

In addition, Participant 4's identification of insufficient community support aligns with existing literature that links community involvement to the availability of extracurricular opportunities and the enhancement of students' musical skills and passion (Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 5's emphasis on technology disparities resonates with research discussing the impact of limited access to digital platforms on the disadvantage of underprivileged students in the contemporary music landscape (De Villiers 2015; Yende 2023). Lastly, Participant 6's insight into social and cultural stigmas corresponds with existing literature that explores how these factors contribute to discouragement, which perpetuate cycles of exclusion and limit exploration and excellence in music education. In summary, the participants' responses align with a robust body of literature, which collectively underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by underprivileged students in the pursuit of music education.

Socio-Economic Factors Have an Impact on Students' Ability to Fully Engage in Music Education Programmes

In this article, many participants agreed that socio-economic disparities could affect students' overall well-being, including access to mental health resources, which could

potentially have an impact on their ability to focus and fully participate in music education activities.

> Limited financial resources can constrain a student's access to instruments, private lessons, and extracurricular music activities, hindering their full engagement in music education programmes. (Participant 1)

> Socio-economic factors, such as parents' educational background and income, may influence a student's exposure to music at home, affecting their readiness and comfort level in a formal music education setting. (Participant 2)

> Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds might face challenges in affording transportation to music lessons or attending cultural events, limiting their exposure to diverse musical experiences. (Participant 3)

> The cost of participation in music competitions or festivals can pose a barrier for students with limited financial means, impacting their ability to showcase their talents and interact with a broader musical community. (Participant 4)

> Unequal access to technology at home may impede students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in leveraging online resources for music learning, creating a digital divide in their engagement with music education programmes. (Participant 5)

> Lack of financial resources prevents children and students from low-income backgrounds from receiving the same quality of education as their wealthier counterparts, which is their biggest obstacle. Many students are unable to purchase keyboards and pianos for themselves. Their academic and professional prospects may be hampered as a result, and there may be fewer educational options. Parental lack of support is a barrier because some children have absentee parents, some parents work, or some parents can't afford to take children to concerts. (Participant 6)

Existing literature consistently supports the notion that socio-economic disparities have an impact on students' overall well-being, including their ability to fully engage in music education programmes (De Villiers 2015; Devroop 2012; Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 1's observation regarding limited financial resources as a constraint aligns with research highlighting the financial barriers hindering access to instruments and extracurricular activities in music education.

Participant 2's insight into how socio-economic factors, such as parents' background and income, influence students' exposure to music at home resonates with studies emphasising the importance of early musical experiences in formal music education settings (Lonie and Dickens 2016). Participant 3's mention of transportation challenges for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds corresponds with literature discussing barriers to accessing cultural events and diverse musical experiences (Yende and Madolo 2023).

Participant 4's note on the cost of participation in music competitions aligns with existing research on financial barriers that have an impact on students' ability to showcase talents and engage with a broader musical community. Participant 5's highlighting of the digital divide owing to unequal access to technology echoes literature discussing technology-related disparities in music education (Gorgoretti 2019; Gouzouasis and Bakan 2011).

Finally, Participant 6's assertion that lack of financial resources poses a significant obstacle, affecting the quality of education and limiting educational options, corresponds with broader research on the socio-economic factors influencing academic and professional prospects in music education (Yende and Madolo 2023). Together, these participants' responses mirror established literature, emphasising the intricate relationship between socio-economic factors and students' ability to engage fully in music education programmes.

Discussions

The participants' discussions aligned with the CoI model, a widely used framework in online and blended learning (Garrison et al. 2000). The model's three elements – cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence – were applied to the context of blended music education in South African higher education. The discussions elaborated on how the model aids in understanding cognitive engagement, community building and instructor roles in this unique educational setting.

In the realm of curriculum diversity, the participants' views resonate with existing literature on the progress made in incorporating diverse musical genres and traditions (De Villiers 2015; Netshivhambe 2023; Yende and Madolo 2023). Participant 1's call for more global perspectives aligns with studies advocating comprehensive music education (De Villiers 2015), while Participant 2's emphasis on educator cultural competence reflects the role of teaching methods in fostering inclusivity (Kigozi 2008).

The challenges faced by underprivileged students in accessing high-quality music education mirror established research on the impact of limited financial resources (Yende and Madolo 2023). The participants' observations correspond with literature on the barriers of inadequate facilities, unequal distribution of resources, lack of exposure to diverse genres, insufficient community support, limited technology access, and social–cultural stigmas (Dibben 2006).

Lastly, discussions on the socio-economic factors that have an impact on students' ability to engage fully in music education programmes align with existing literature emphasising the multifaceted nature of such disparities (De Villiers 2015; Yende and Madolo 2023). The participants' insights echo research on financial constraints, transportation challenges, limited access to technology and parental support as significant barriers. Overall, the participants' perspectives in both contexts align with established literature, which provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities in blended music education and the challenges faced by underprivileged students in accessing quality music education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the discussions about the CoI model in the context of blended music education, curriculum diversity and challenges faced by underprivileged students underscore the intricate dynamics in the realm of music education. The CoI model serves as a robust framework, offering a structured approach to understanding the complexities of online and blended learning experiences.

The application of the CoI Model in blended teaching and learning of music in South African higher education illuminates the model's versatility. By examining cognitive presence, the model sheds light on how blended learning elevates cognitive engagement in music education. It emphasises the integration of technology in enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving, and developing musical skills. This reflects the evolving landscape of music education, where online components play a pivotal role in fostering creativity and analytical abilities.

Social presence, another key element of the CoI Model, encourages a holistic examination of interactions in creating a sense of community among music students. The discussions highlight the impact of blended learning on collaborative music-making, peer feedback and community building. This social aspect is crucial to motivation, a sense of belonging and overall student satisfaction in blended music education programmes. The CoI model, through its social presence component, emphasises the importance of community and collaboration in the learning process, which aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that recognise the significance of peer interactions.

Teaching presence, the third element of the CoI model, facilitates an analysis of instructors' roles in designing, facilitating and assessing blended music courses. It encompasses strategies employed by instructors to support diverse learners, address technological challenges and create a supportive learning environment. The model provides a comprehensive lens through which researchers and educators can evaluate the effectiveness of instructional methods in both online and face-to-face components. This focus on teaching presence aligns with ongoing discussions in education about the pivotal role of instructors in guiding and shaping the learning experience.

Regarding the discussions on curriculum diversity, the participants' views reflect both progress and the need for improvement in music education. The acknowledgement of increased representation of diverse musical genres and cultural traditions, such as the marimba, African drums and the thumb piano, demonstrates positive strides. However, the participants rightly pointed out the importance of going beyond surface-level inclusivity. The call for a more comprehensive integration of the music of marginalised communities emphasises the necessity of a truly inclusive approach.

The participant perspectives align with existing literature, which emphasises the importance of inclusive curricula (Smith et al. 2023). The participants' nuanced views mirror broader discussions in the field about the balance between representation and depth in music education. While there is recognition of progress, there is also an acknowledgment of the challenges in fully embracing a diverse musical landscape. The emphasis on the quality of education and the way diverse genres are taught reflects a deeper concern for ensuring that inclusivity is not merely tokenistic but contributes meaningfully to students' understanding and appreciation of diverse musical traditions.

Finally, the exploration of challenges faced by underprivileged students in accessing high-quality music education delves into the systemic barriers that hinder educational equity. The participants' insights echo established research on the impact of limited financial resources, inadequate facilities, unequal distribution of resources, lack of exposure to diverse genres, insufficient community support, limited technology access and social–cultural stigmas. The experiences shared by the participants underline the urgent need for systemic changes to deal with these barriers. The socio-economic factors influencing students' ability to engage fully in music education programmes are complex and multifaceted. The discussions highlight the importance of not only acknowledging these challenges but also actively seeking solutions to create a more equitable and inclusive music education landscape.

In summary, the intertwining themes of the CoI model, curriculum diversity, and challenges faced by underprivileged students provide a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape of music education. The CoI model emerges as a versatile framework, adeptly aligning with the evolving dynamics of blended teaching and learning. It emphasises the interconnectedness of cognitive, social and teaching aspects, which provided researchers and educators with a nuanced lens to navigate the complexities of modern music education.

The discussions on curriculum diversity reveal both progress and the persistent need for improvement. While there is recognition of increased representation, the participants' call for a more inclusive and balanced curriculum reflects a commitment to ensuring that students receive a comprehensive and meaningful music education. The exploration of challenges faced by underprivileged students serves as a poignant reminder of the systemic inequalities embedded in the education system. The participants' voices

amplify the urgency of addressing these issues and fostering a more inclusive, accessible and equitable music education environment.

Recommendations

Based on the participants and existing literature, the following recommendations were made:

- Enhance financial accessibility: Implement scholarship and financial aid programmes specifically tailored for underprivileged students pursuing music education. These initiatives should cover the costs of instruments, lessons and essential materials to ensure that financial constraints do not hinder access to high-quality music education. Collaborate with governmental and non-governmental organisations to secure funding for these initiatives.

- Promote inclusive curriculum development: Establish a collaborative task force involving educators, musicians and cultural experts to review and diversify the music curriculum. Prioritise the inclusion of music from marginalised communities to ensure a more comprehensive representation of diverse musical traditions. This effort should not only focus on broadening the range of musical genres but also emphasise culturally competent teaching methods. Regularly assess and update the curriculum to reflect evolving musical landscapes.

- Expand community support programmes: Develop and strengthen partnerships between educational institutions, local communities and businesses to provide additional support for underprivileged students. Establish community music programmes, mentorship initiatives and extracurricular opportunities that go beyond the classroom. This holistic approach aims to address challenges such as limited access to practice spaces, transportation and technology. Encourage local businesses to sponsor music events, provide instruments, or offer mentorship programmes to support underprivileged students in their musical endeavours.

Implementing these recommendations requires a collaborative effort from educational institutions, policymakers and the broader community. By enhancing financial accessibility, promoting inclusive curriculum development, and expanding community support programmes, we can strive towards a more equitable and enriching music education environment for all students.

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