

# TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FACTORS THAT CHALLENGE AND ADVANCE MUSIC EDUCATION IN K-12 SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN LEBANON

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Alongside a strong connection with sound and early exploration of music, it was still difficult for me to envision a music career until I decided to pursue a degree in music technology at the American University in Cairo in 2015.

This study is dedicated to aspiring musicians, challenged music teachers, and leaders in education.

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## 01. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In parallel to Lebanese society's appreciation of education and creative expression, STEAM education still struggles. The Lebanese Ministry of Education issued a decree in 2001 that excluded fine arts from official examinations. Not only did this decision reposition the arts as periphery subjects but it also led many schools to completely dismantle fine arts programs due to limited budget and weak parent associations. Amidst socio-political and economic upheaval, the vibrant arts and culture scene is on the verge of collapse.

## 02. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are teachers' perceptions of the factors that challenge and advance music education in Lebanese schools?

## 03. KEY STUDIES

Scant research was found on the state of music education in Lebanon and the challenges that music teachers currently face in the country. The examined literature served as a foundation and reference for the Lebanese context.

### MUSIC AND THE BRAIN



- MUSICIANS HAVE A STRONGER LINK BETWEEN THE BRAIN HALVES
- MUSIC TRAINING INDUCES NEUROPLASTIC CHANGES IN ALL PARTS OF THE BRAIN (KRAUS & WHITE-SCHWACH, 2020)
- MUSIC TRAINING SHAPES HEALTHIER AND MORE PRODUCTIVE LEARNERS (MENON & LEVITING, 2005)

### LEBANESE MUSIC PROGRAMS



- ONLY 5 UNIVERSITIES (13.8%) IN LEBANON OFFER HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION DEGREES (YAMMINE, 2016)
- LOW QUALITY PRE-COLLEGE MUSIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### CREATIVE INDUSTRIES



- THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES EMPLOY 29.5 MILLION PEOPLE AND CONTRIBUTE TO INNOVATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CULTURAL DIVERSITY, PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE (UN, 2021)

### WAYS TO ENHANCE MUSIC EDUCATION



- ENRICH THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND TEACHING MUSIC (HENSEN, 2003)
- ENSURE A SPACE OF DIALOGUE ABOUT MUSIC (CLEMMENTS, 2010)
- ESTABLISH COMMUNITY LINKS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH MUSIC INDUSTRY (VICTORIA'S DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2022)

## 05. RESULTS/FINDINGS

### THE ROLE OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN SOCIETY



#### 01. COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

"When students learn music, they learn to listen. We need to listen more than we scream." (Participant B).

#### 02. HOLISTIC LEARNING AND WELL-BEING

"We, music teachers, are building individuals who are able to excel in any career they pursue" (Participant E).

### SOCIOCULTURAL BARRIERS



#### 01. RELATIONSHIP COMPLEXITIES BETWEEN MUSIC EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND RELIGION.

"Parents want their kids to play music but they don't want them to become musicians" (Participant E).

#### 02. LACK OF AWARENESS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

"No one would say: I want my child to learn music so that they can become better doctors and engineers. This is very important! But people still haven't figured that out, yet" (Participant C).

### INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS



#### 01. SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND ABSENCE OF MUSIC COORDINATOR POSITIONS

"Schools do not care about music because the government does not care" (Participant C).

#### 02. LACK OF QUALIFIED MUSIC EDUCATORS

"Some situations are heartbreaking to witness" (Participant A).

### STUDENT MOTIVATION



#### 01. ENGAGEMENT

"There is always a key to every student" (Participant A).

#### 02. HOLISTIC LEARNING

"You can inspire math enthusiasts through music by highlighting the connection between the two" (Participant E).

## IMPLICATIONS

The generated themes illustrated that socio-cultural, institutional, and professional barriers are intensely challenging music educators who creatively attempt to achieve development on the individual student level and communal societal levels.

It might be easy to assume that music educators alone can change the narrative and transform the attitudes and beliefs of a whole society, school administrations' leadership, and government decisions. However, the intersection of the issues facing music educators in Lebanon requires a critical examination and collaborative efforts for fundamental change to take place.

## 04. METHODOLOGY

- Phenomenological approach to answer "what" and "how" questions
- In depth one hour interviews were conducted in person
- Thematic relationships drawn upon data analysis

Table 1  
Participants' Demographics

Education	Current Position	Experience (Years)	Sex	Code
M.A in Music Education	K-6	19	Male	Participant (A)
M.A in Education	Retired	27	Female	Participant (B)
M.A in Music Education	K-8	17	Male	Participant (C)
M.A in Music Education	K-4	23	Female	Participant (D)
B.A in Music Education	K-8	2	Male	Participant (E)
Conservatory Alumnus	1-9	8	Male	Participant (F)

## 06. CONCLUSION

While music proved to be an essential educational subject that guarantees a holistic learning experience for students, enabling them to become better students, leaders and human beings, there is a strong need for fundamental societal and structural changes. This includes challenging socio-cultural beliefs and advocating for the acknowledgement and proper inclusion of music within the Lebanese education system.

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