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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

الجامعة الأمريكية بالقاهرة

Graduate Studies

**Teachers' Perceptions of the Factors  
that Challenge and Advance Music  
Education in K-12 Schools: A  
Qualitative Study in Lebanon**

A Thesis Submitted by

**Khaldoun Abou Dargham**

to the

**International and Comparative Education**

**Graduate Program**

December 6, 2023

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts**

## Acknowledgements

I dedicate this study to aspiring musicians, challenged music teachers, and leaders in education. Alongside my innate strong connection with sound, a family of art lovers raised me in an environment that fueled my passion with a lot of curiosity to explore my own musicality through playing my favorite songs, by ear, on a tiny electric keyboard. Improvising melodies became the way I could understand myself best. Culture and a non-optimal education system; however, made it difficult for me to envision a music career. In the absence of proper guidance and music training, I let go of a dream I did not know I had until I was granted the Tomorrow's Leaders Undergraduate scholarship in 2015 and decided to pursue a degree in music technology at the American University in Cairo.

For that, I extend gratitude to my family and Mrs. Zubeida Husseiky for providing a space for inspiration and self-discovery. I also extend gratitude to my music professors Ashraf Fouad, John Baboukis, Dina Iskander and Nesma Mahgoub who helped me find my voice as a performer. To my music technology professors Mohamed Sakr, Wael El Mahallawy and Shahir Nakhla (may his soul rest in peace): thank you for inspiring me with pioneering careers, dedication to teach what you love, and mentorship.

Following the footsteps of artists that devote their creations to the betterment of individuals and vulnerable communities, the belief in activism solidified within me as I continued to witness injustice all around. That being said, I give thanks to professor Malak Zaalouk who showed me that education, in its essence, is a service to humanity above anything else.

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## **Abstract**

Music education plays a crucial role in developing students on the individual level and societies on the communal level. Despite its benefits on the human brain, student learning, physical and mental health, and its contribution to culture and the creative economy, music education still faces challenges that prevent it from fulfilling its potential. Due to scant research on the factors that impact music education in Lebanon, this phenomenological study explored the perceptions of six K-12 music teachers in Mount Lebanon through in-depth interviews regarding the issue. Drawing upon the constructivist and humanistic learning theories, the research investigated how the Lebanese society influences student attitudes towards music learning. Specifically, the study explored teachers' perceptions of the factors that prevent music education from reaching its full potential in Lebanese private schools and provided insights on how it can be improved. It also examined how fostering creativity, innovation, individuality, and freedom inside the classroom can advance music education. The research findings highlighted that regardless of the teachers' vehement belief in the importance and impact of music education, institutional and socio-cultural challenges have been obstructing an ideal reality from forming in Lebanon. In light of these findings, four main themes were drawn: The Role of Music Education in Lebanese Society, Socio-Cultural Barriers, Institutional Barriers, and Student Motivation. Finally, the researcher discussed how these themes are interrelated and shed light on how teachers in Lebanon cope with external challenges in creative ways inside the classroom to inspire change.

**Keywords:** Music Education, STEAM Education, K-12 Education, Fine Arts, Music, Society, Lebanon.

## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| Acknowledgements.....   | 1         |
| Abstract.....   | 2         |
| Table of Contents.....  | 3         |
| <b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>The Role of Music in Education and Society.....</b>                          | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Contextual Background.....</b>   | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Statement of the Problem.....</b>  | <b>10</b> |
| <b>STEAM Education.....</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Theoretical Framework.....</b>   | <b>14</b> |
| <b>The Constructivist Learning Theory.....</b>                                  | <b>14</b> |
| <b>The Humanistic Learning Theory.....</b>                                      | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Research Questions.....</b>  | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Significance of the Study.....</b>   | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Organization of the Study.....</b>   | <b>19</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>  | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Education Relevance and Quality.....</b>                                     | <b>21</b> |
| <b>Music, the Brain, and Learning.....</b>                                      | <b>21</b> |
| <b>UN Perspective and Initiatives: Music as a Tool to Achieve SDGs.....</b>     | <b>23</b> |
| <b>Current State of Music Education in Lebanon.....</b>                         | <b>24</b> |
| <b>The Factors that Obstruct Music Education in Lebanon and the Region.....</b> | <b>25</b> |
| <b>The Effects of Culture and Religion on Music Education.....</b>              | <b>27</b> |
| <b>Ways to Enhance Music Education in Schools.....</b>                          | <b>29</b> |
| <b>Chapter Summary.....</b>   | <b>30</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....</b>  | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Research Design.....</b>   | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Participants and Setting.....</b>  | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Data Collection Procedures.....</b>  | <b>33</b> |
| <b>Data Analysis.....</b>   | <b>34</b> |
| <b>Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research.....</b>                             | <b>35</b> |
| <b>Protection of Human Participants.....</b>                                    | <b>36</b> |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Limitations of the Study</b> .....   | 36 |
| <b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</b> .....  | 38 |
| <b>Theme One: The Role of Music Education in Society</b> .....  | 38 |
| <b>Communication, Collaboration, and Social Cohesion</b> .....  | 38 |
| <b>Holistic Learning and Well-being</b> .....   | 40 |
| <b>Theme Two: Socio-Cultural Barriers</b> .....   | 41 |
| <b>Relationship Complexities Between Music Education, Culture, and Religion</b> .....   | 41 |
| <b>Lack of Awareness on the Importance of Music as a School Subject</b> .....   | 43 |
| <b>Recommendations</b> .....  | 45 |
| <b>Theme Three: Institutional Barriers</b> .....  | 46 |
| <b>Education System in Lebanon and Funding</b> .....  | 46 |
| <b>School Leadership and Absence of Music Coordinator Positions</b> .....   | 47 |
| <b>Lack of Qualified Music Educators</b> .....  | 49 |
| <b>Recommendations</b> .....  | 50 |
| <b>Theme Four: Student Motivation</b> .....   | 51 |
| <b>Engagement</b> .....   | 51 |
| <b>Individuality</b> .....  | 51 |
| <b>Games</b> .....  | 52 |
| <b>Diverse Content</b> .....  | 52 |
| <b>Holistic Learning</b> .....  | 53 |
| <b>Student Choice</b> .....   | 53 |
| <b>Self-Assessment</b> .....  | 55 |
| <b>Safe Learning Environment</b> .....  | 56 |
| <b>Recommendations</b> .....  | 57 |
| <b>Chapter Summary</b> .....  | 57 |
| <b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....  | 59 |
| <b>Question One: What are the socio-cultural factors that challenge and advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?</b> ..... | 60 |
| <b>Question Two: What are the institutional barriers that music teachers face in K-12 Lebanese schools?</b> .....                     | 61 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Question Three: How can <i>student choice</i> advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?</b> .....                  | 63 |
| <b>Question Four: How does fostering engagement advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?</b> .....                   | 64 |
| <b>Question Five: How can self-evaluation advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?</b> .....                         | 65 |
| <b>Question Six: How does honoring student feelings and knowledge advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?</b> ..... | 66 |
| <b>Question Seven: How can creating a safe learning environment advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?</b> .....   | 66 |
| <b>Recommendations</b> .....  | 67 |
| <b>Future Scope of the Research</b> .....   | 69 |
| <b>Conclusion of the Study</b> .....  | 70 |
| <b>References</b> .....   | 71 |
| <b>APPENDICES</b> .....   | 80 |
| <b>Appendix A: IRB Approval</b> .....   | 80 |
| <b>Appendix B: English Consent Form</b> .....   | 81 |
| <b>Appendix C: Interview Questions</b> .....  | 82 |

### List of Figures

|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| <b>Figure 1</b> ..... | 14 |
| <b>Figure 2</b> ..... | 16 |

### List of Tables

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| <b>Table 1</b> ..... | 33 |
| <b>Table 2</b> ..... | 45 |
| <b>Table 3</b> ..... | 50 |
| <b>Table 4</b> ..... | 57 |

## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| AEC    | Association Européenne des Conservatoires                        |
| AFAC   | Arab Fund for Arts and Culture                                   |
| AMAR   | Arabic Music Archiving and Research Foundation                   |
| CERD   | Center for Educational Research and Development                  |
| MEHE   | Ministry of Education and Higher Education                       |
| SDGs   | Sustainable Development Goals                                    |
| SJR    | Scimago Journal and Country Rank                                 |
| STEM   | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics                 |
| STEAM  | Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics           |
| UNCTAD | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development               |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Program                               |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNFPA  | United Nations Fund for Population Activities                    |
| UNRIC  | United Nations Regional Information Center                       |
| WGU    | Western Governors University                                     |



## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction to the Chapter**

This study explored teachers' perceptions of the factors that prevent music education from reaching its full potential in Lebanese private schools and provided insights on how music education can be improved. Due to scant research on music education in Lebanon, this study presented an issue that literature deemed as crucial to bring to light. The advancement of music education as an academic subject mirrors the advancements in both disciplines: education and musicology, as it draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of both (Varkøy, 2009).

### **The Role of Music in Education and Society**

Music education not only includes formal and informal teaching and learning of music within schools, it also encompasses the development of music skills and student awareness which takes place in diverse and less structured settings (Stock, 2003). According to Varkøy (2009), "Music education centers on the philosophy, theory, and study of individuals, music, society, and teaching and learning, and not least the relationship between these elements" (p. 34). Unlike mainstream definitions of music as a tool for entertainment and a vehicle for producing pleasant sounds, music is multidimensional in nature and function (Kokkidou, 2021).

The arts, in general, foster children's development not just cognitively but also emotionally and psychomotorically (Ge et al., 2015). The arts also improve students' ability to think critically and solve problems, foster creativity, and promote self-expression (Ge et al., 2015). The impact of the arts, however, transcends the individual and influences societal changes. For example, the way music is acquired, taught, and performed is influenced by culture. Radocy and Boyle (1979) stated that "culture clearly affects musical behavior and music may influence the culture in which it is produced" (p. 27). Not only is the influence

bidirectional, but music also plays a crucial role in ensuring the stability and spread of culture (Radocy & Boyle, 1979). Culture avoids extinction through education, enculturation, or cultural learning (Merriam, 1964). On the other hand, it also derives its dynamic quality from the same cultural learning process.

The Tajdid min al-Dakhil, or “Renewal from Within,” for example, is a movement in Lebanon that attracted attention after 2009 for its attempt to revive music from the Nahda (1885-1940), translated as “Arab Renaissance” (Cunha, 2022). The efforts of this movement are exclusively attributed to two private institutions in Lebanon: the Antonine University (Ba’abda) and the Arabic Music Archiving and Research Foundation (AMAR). Cunha (2022) argues that the Lebanese Tajdid’s revivalist attempts are a challenge to the “current mainstream notions of tradition, identity, and belonging in Lebanon” (para. 2). He views this movement as a conscious organization by society’s members to sculpt a representative culture that merges modernity with the legacy of Arab culture.

What relates to culture in general also applies to music: without a thorough music learning process, it is impossible to comprehend the sounds which humans produce (Merriam, 1964). Nettl (1975) agreed that “through an enculturation process, each social order develops its institutions and artifacts for perpetuation of itself, and music’s existence is one of the few things common to all cultures” (p. 71). Furthermore, he emphasized how music, as a common feature in all of the latter, can serve as a focal point for determining a society's social and cultural underpinnings. Music is not only a creative expressive tool that aids in understanding individuals, countries, and cultures; it also helps schools, students and communities to work more efficiently. According to Kelly (2016), schools should incorporate the community into the teaching of cultural knowledge and expectations so we can ensure more societal usefulness and

efficacy. Music, for instance, allows the creation and re-construction of individual identity and helps people organize their daily practices, understand their social reality, and shape more meaningful actions (Denora, 2000).

### **Contextual Background**

The presence of the Ottoman Empire, the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Byzantine Empire, Roman, Greek, Phoenician, and Arab cultures in Lebanon has shaped a mosaic of identities in a 10,452 square kilometers nation (Fakhoury, 1983). Within a significantly divided Lebanese society - due to the civil war (1975 - 1990), migration, language, religious diversity and political ideologies - the people are left with a continuous hunger for creativity and artistic modes of expression to document their memories and overcome their struggles (Fanack, 2010). Fanack (2010) reported how the unique combination of Western and Eastern elements made Lebanese music stand out even during the civil war. The popularity of the alternative Western music scene coincided with a growing interest in Arabic Pop, which resulted in the emergence of Beirut's Arabic music industry. In addition, an *underground* scene — encompassing blues, jazz, hip-hop, rock, post-punk, psychedelic and electronic core — came to life leading to a fresh wave of a youthful Lebanese indie-rock music scene (Fanack).

This vibrant and diverse Lebanese music scene is weaved in a society that highly values education. The large number of universities (Center for Educational Research and Development [CERD], 2018) and research publications (Scimago Journal & Country Rank [SJR], 2021) in the country reflect a Lebanese community that gives a lot of importance to education and scientific research (CERD, 2018). Well-educated Lebanese citizens are considered among the country's most precious assets (Fakhoury, 1983). Lebanon's economic and social prospects are strongly correlated with the quality of education offered. This is a common belief not only

among individuals but also within educational institutions. Fakhoury (1983) highlights that, in Lebanon, education is a vehicle for personal development at the individual level and a means to develop the community it serves at the institutional level. However, there is a disparity in the quality of systems. Nahas (2011) highlights how the traditional role of the government in education has been limited to ensure the thriving of private educational enterprises. Fakhoury affirms stating, “effective education is imparted through private foreign schools and universities in spite of a weak national system” (p.17).

Lebanese society’s appreciation of artistic expression resulted in a pioneering music education effort in the country. The Lebanese national anthem's composer, Wadih Sabra, established the Music School in 1910 (Fanack, 2010). In 1929, the school changed its name to the Lebanese National Conservatory, the region's first institution of its sort. The conservatory had its own chamber orchestra under the direction of Raif Abillama, and it operated as a national archive and music research center from 1953 until the commencement of the civil war in 1975. Fanack (2010) explained that, “by the middle of the 20th century, the conservatory was an autonomous institute supported by the state under the supervision of the minister of education” (Fanack, 2010, para. 37). However, the conservatory is now an entity of the Ministry of Culture determined “to fill in a gap in the Lebanese educational system that does not emphasize music education” (Maalouf, 2023, p.2).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In parallel to Lebanese society’s appreciation of education and creative expression, music education in the country has been facing institutional and economic challenges that threaten its survival as an essential element in education (Khayat, 2020). The Lebanese Center for Educational Research and Development (n.d) reported that, on June 15<sup>th</sup> in 2001, the

Ministry of Education issued a decree that excluded the arts from official examinations, which both public and private schools follow, with the exception of international schools, which follow foreign education systems. This move came after a promising shift in the ministry's public narrative, which called for improved music education and overall art integration in instructional practices (CERD, n.d). 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. The CERD described this as the murder of a pioneering initiative before it officially kicked off.

As a result of this narrative shift, the arts and culture sector encompassing music education has suffered greater consequences in the middle of instability. The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and Culture Resource organizations launched the Solidarity Fund for Arts and Culture Structures in order to address the arts and culture sector's needs amidst socio-political upheaval in Lebanon (AFAC, 2018). The organizations reported:

Given the general absence of public funding, policies, incentives, and support, the arts and culture sector has always been precarious. In fact, inventiveness and creativity have been the product of individual and small collective efforts. Today, this vibrant arts and culture scene and relative freedom of expression are at high risk of collapse, putting enormous pressure on arts and culture organizations. (para. 2)

As for the existing Pre-College Music Education system in Lebanon, Yammine (2016) reveals, through the *Association Européenne des Conservatoires* (AEC), that prior to entering higher education, music programs still fall short of the required standards for students to qualify for professional music programs.

## **STEAM Education**

The challenges that fine art programs face in Lebanon exist on a global level, too. The federal governments of the United States and several other industrialized nations have invested a significant amount of money to support educational research in K–12 schooling and postsecondary education in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects (Ge et al., 2015). The focus on STEM subjects inspired academic leaders and scholars to start looking into how to incorporate the arts into STEM education over time. The Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, for instance, has a program that incorporates art and design into STEM teaching. Annually, the National Technology Leadership Coalition hosts a summit with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) education that has been moving forward with STEAM Education Research 385 since 2012. Recommendations from the summit suggest that STEAM education not only supports STEM education but also benefit students holistically (Ge et al., 2015).

The inclusion of the arts in the curriculum is believed to have a number of benefits by those who favor STEAM programs (Ge et al., 2015). The historical practice of fostering expressive and imaginative thinking skills is being carried out, whereby creativity is encouraged as a means of generating meaning and raising the standard of living (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In its World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the UNESCO (2006) stated that “learning how to be imaginative, interesting and productive is essential and necessary in a learning culture as all students need to develop the skills to intuitively remain open and sensitive to their world” (p.2). Additionally, students' critical thinking, creativity, self-expression, problem-solving abilities, emotional, cognitive, and

psychomotor development are all aided by the integration of the arts with STEM subjects (Ge et al., 2015).

According to internationally conducted studies of STEAM, some consider STEAM education as a vehicle to improve student “learning, interest, or engagement in STEM disciplines, while others use STEAM to focus on enhancing the arts” (Ge et al., 2015, p.20). In either case, STEAM education proves that teaching science at school can include more integration, eliminating barriers between subjects (Yakman, 2008). The aforementioned effort of expanding STEAM research, however, has not yet been successful in transmuting STEM education into STEAM where the default focus and investment include the arts just as much as the other branches. As a result, art programs are still the first to be dismissed when issues of funding arise. In its report, The Center for Online Education (2011) stated:

Fine arts education - including music, theater, drawing, painting, or sculpture, whether in practice or theory, has been a part of any well-rounded curriculum for decades — but that may be changing. Many schools today are cutting back or eliminating their art programs due to budget constraints. It is estimated that by the end of this year, more than 25% of public high schools will have completely dismantled them. (para.1)

Apparently, this still seems to be the case because the Phillips (2019) reported through the Royal Academy of Arts in the UK how Art being under threat is a growing crisis in higher education leading to “major reductions in what art schools have to spend per pupil, directly affecting the extent and quality of the country’s arts and design courses” (para. 2). In Lebanon, like in other parts of the world, music education has been suffering from budget cuts and lack of attention, which threatens its survival and quality. This problem, however, is still heavily under

researched and can be thoroughly understood by examining the Lebanese context, which is the primary aim of this study.

### Theoretical Framework

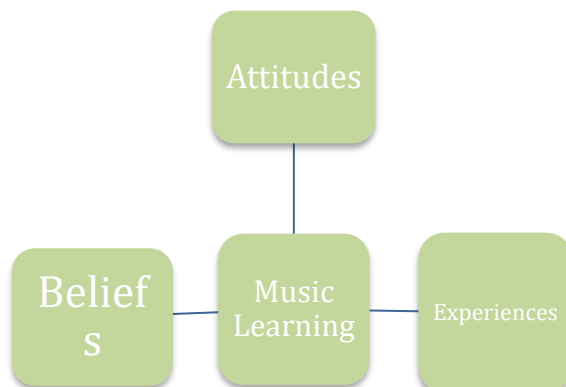
This study, as it examined the existing literature and the perceptions of Lebanese music teachers on the issue, based its analysis of the collected data on the principles of constructivist and humanistic learning theories.

#### The Constructivist Learning Theory

The constructivist learning theory, rooted in the works of Dewey (1929), Bruner (1961), Vygotsky (1962) and Piaget (1980), believes that the context in which a concept is presented, along with students' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences have an impact on learning (Bada, 2015). In psychology, constructivism describes how individuals acquire knowledge (Bada, 2015). According to the constructivist theory, music learning involves more than just developing skills. It occurs when students find personal meaning in music, have the opportunity to ask questions, connect it to their prior knowledge and experiences, and arrive at understandings about music that they didn't just receive; instead, they discovered (Shively, 2015). The constructivist learning theory, in music learning context, can be summed up in the figure below.

**Figure 1**

*Principles of the Constructivist Learning Theory*





## **The Humanistic Learning Theory**

The humanistic learning theory was also followed due to its emphasis on creativity, innovation, individuality, and freedom over learner efficiency, uniformity, and controlled responses (Johnson, 2014). Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers first developed the theory recognizing that regardless of a low science score, education should aim to develop students into self-actualized individuals who can thrive in the real world (Johnson, 2014). In addition to pursuing a creative endeavor, examples of self-actualization include “seeking personal development through continuous learning and acquiring new skills, engaging in acts of kindness and altruism to contribute to the well-being of others, and engaging in self-reflection and introspection to gain deeper self-awareness and personal insight” (Perera, 2023, para. 3).

The humanistic approach acknowledges that learning, development, and growth are inherent human tendencies (Johnson, 2014). Therefore, education is most effective when it aligns with these inclinations, Johnson adds. Since learners are social agents, effectively educating and influencing them takes precedence over covering the entire curriculum. It might be difficult to measure and quantify creativity, inspiration, and intuition using the conventional examinations used in today's schools (Johnson, 2014). Therefore, this qualitative study tries to explore these attributes that are often given little attention in terms of their importance to humankind's advancement.

This theory aligns with this paper as it explores non-traditional learning and development approaches that emphasize holistic learning. Employing this theory provides an essential foundation to better understand the modern status of music education in Lebanon and analyze the research findings based on progressive learning theories. The principles of humanistic learning theory are shown in the figure below:

## Figure 2

### *Principles of the Humanistic Learning Theory*



#### **Student Choice**

According to this approach, learning should be as self-directed as possible (Johnson, 2014). Individuals will learn more quickly and readily if they have mastered the abilities to analyze what is essential to them and why, as well as the ability to align their behavior with those needs and wants (Huitt, 2009). In other words, students should have a say in what they learn, how they acquire it, and how they present it to a great extent (Johnson, 2014).

#### **Fostering Engagement**

This learning approach emphasizes that teachers need to respect and develop student individuality through education to ensure engagement (Karthikeyan, 2013). According to Karthikeyan (2013), “We should understand the child first of all, and then teach him. We, as teachers, should know our students, their interest, personality, capabilities and background environment and use teaching methods and content accordingly” (p. 58). Johnson (2014) adds, “Remember, we teach human beings, not curriculum” (p. 6).

#### **Self-evaluation**

According to the humanistic learning approach, the only accurate assessment of individuals’ work is their own (Huitt, 2009). Here, the focus is on personal growth and self-control, Huitt (2009) explains. The majority of educators would probably concur that this is crucial, but they would also argue that students' capacity to satisfy outside expectations must be

developed.

### **Feelings and Knowledge**

Humanistic psychology contends that emotions and knowledge should not be separated because they are both equally important to learning (Western Governors University [WGU], 2020). Humanistic educators believe that feelings and knowledge go hand in hand throughout the learning process. Emotional and cognitive learning are equally necessary for humanistic learning. All classes and activities should emphasize the whole student—their intellect and feelings—rather than just one or the other (WGU, 2020).

### **Safe Learning Environment**

In addition to physical threats, threats can also be social, emotional, or in the form of things that undermine someone's self-worth. Failure is a common occurrence in schools when the focus shifts to competitiveness and meeting standards (Johnson, 2014). Johnson (2014) further argues that “this is why, the arts and athletics are so important in education. I would go on for pages describing the arts as the only real human thing left in the curriculum” (p. 6). He explains how the arts—dance, theatre, music, literature, and visual—all contribute to our understanding of what it means to be human. They give expression to the aspect of us that is intrapersonal and shared by all people, he adds.

### **Research Questions**

This qualitative, phenomenological case study explored music teachers' perceptions of the factors that challenge and advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon. The research questions were derived from the aforementioned learning theories. The main research question is:

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

To further investigate the issue, the study will address each of the following sub-questions:

1. What are the socio-cultural factors that challenge and advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?
2. What are the institutional barriers that music teachers face in K-12 Lebanese schools?
3. How can student choice advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?
4. How does fostering engagement advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?
5. How can self-evaluation advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?
6. How does honoring students' feelings and knowledge advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?
7. How can creating a safe learning environment advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?

### **Significance of Study**

This research provides in depth exploration of the factors that challenge music education in Lebanese schools. Furthermore, it provides elaborate perceptions and recommendations from professional teachers on how music education can be enhanced in order to fulfill its potential as an essential educational tool. This study also serves as a reference for future researchers, music educators, students and professional musicians who might be interested to further explore and enhance music education. The existing research on the Lebanese music education system is scant and requires significant expansion. Information found in very few articles or news reports, mostly in Arabic, positions Lebanon in a medium that might alienate it from international

discussions, which are crucial for advancement efforts and exposure to updated tools for enhancing music education.

This study is relevant to the population being sampled as the Lebanese society highly values both art as a form of expression and education as a tool of advancement. Insights from professional music educators are crucial to advance the debate and support existing efforts and initiatives aimed at addressing the socio-political and economic challenges currently faced by the Lebanese.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research paper is divided into five main chapters. The first chapter provides an overview and introduction to the research paper's topic, an elaboration of its significance, main goals, and the theoretical framework used to analyze the collected data. The second chapter offers a review of the relevant existing literature. The third chapter presents the methodology used for the study, including the research design, participants, setting, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures. Following that, the fourth chapter presents the study's findings organized into four main themes. Finally, the last chapter discusses the research results, analyzing them based on the study's theoretical framework and in the context of the literature. It also includes recommendations for future research and professional practice.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction to the Chapter

To gain a deeper understanding of how music education impacts students and society, why music education is facing challenges, and the existing ways of enhancing it, this literature review will be divided into the following sections: *Education Relevance and Quality*, where the two terms are clarified and examples of how they can be achieved are provided. *Music, the Brain, and Learning* presents scientific data on how music education affects the human brain and student's learning and development. *UN Perspective and Initiatives: Music as a Tool to Achieve SDGs* examines the literature exploring how music has been used to contribute to societal and cultural changes in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). *Current State of Music Education in Lebanon* aims to better understand the status of music education in Lebanon through online data and existing evaluation of schools' music education quality. *The Factors that Obstruct and Facilitate Music Education in Lebanese Schools* analyzes what can be contributing to the low quality of schools' music education. *The Effects of Culture and Religion on Music Education* explores some cultural attitudes towards music education and finally *Ways to Enhance Music Education in Schools* highlights the efforts exerted in the field of education in order to improve music learning.

The literature included in this chapter was found through an online search using AUC Online Library, ResearchGate, JSTOR, and the Garland Encyclopedia of Music as the main search engines. Google search for articles and resources on the current status of music education in Lebanon was also utilized. The literature presented is ordered thematically in order to firstly provide broad context about relevance and quality in education, then specifically examine the importance of music education, before finally moving to the specific context of this paper:

Lebanon. This was done in order to better understand the topic through international literature before examining the local context where little was found.

### **Education Relevance and Quality**

Based on the Global Monitoring Report 2005, UNESCO (2013) identifies five major factors that contribute to Education's quality: context, learner's characteristics, inputs, teaching and learning, and outcomes. The report highlights the importance of the learning outcomes, which do not only focus on cognitive skills but also value non-cognitive ones that include social outcomes. In order to ensure quality education, UNESCO proposes that the focus should not be limited to students, instructor's motivation and capacity, curriculum and environment. It is recommended that educational institutions and leaders intervene to ease effective learning. Adopting a holistic approach would enhance the overall quality of education when the curriculum is made more relevant to the needs of children's development as well as the context they live in. Ensuring this needs to be accompanied with higher quality of teachers and leaders who can raise the bar and improve overall learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2013).

### **Music, the Brain, and Learning**

Neuroplastic alterations, in all parts of the brain, are induced by music training (Kraus & White-Schwoch, 2020). Kraus and White-Schwoch's study shows that due to the variety of new neural connections, students' signal efficiency improves. In turn, this explains why musicians outperform non-musicians in cognitive tasks like working memory, attention, and inhibition. The interaction between the two hemispheres of the brain is stronger in musicians, and scientists are observing that playing music causes a variety of new connections to emerge that enhance the corpus callosum. Music improves brain and cognitive function, both of which are crucial for learning (Kraus & White-Schwoch). As a result, these improved abilities help students succeed

in school, the study adds. School administrators and policymakers recommend the prioritization of music education as it prepares pupils to excel in their classes. Music instruction, for example, improves children and adults' capacity to absorb speech in noisy contexts like some classrooms (Kraus & White-Schwoch, 2020).

Musical training also strengthens the area of the brain responsible for sensory and motor skills; allowing children to better interact with their learning environment (Collins, 2013). Not only can music have an impact on young learners, but it also helps trained people keep their cognitive capacities as they age including tasks requiring executive function and short-term memory (Schneider et al, 2018). In the midst of background noise, older musicians are also more focused and hear more clearly.

Music training is also helpful to one's general health. According to research, group musical activities can help people maintain their physical and mental health (Bittman et al, 2013, Gaser & Schlaug, 2003). Playing musical instruments, for example, has been linked to maintaining physical and mental health including lower incidence of dementia, the literature adds (Bittman et al., 2013; Gaser & Schlaug, 2003). The nucleus accumbens, ventral tegmental region, hypothalamus, and insula are among the brain areas involved in reward processing activated by the high-level processing required for musical activities. Because there is less stress and more focus, the brain is more likely to learn, resulting in increased productivity (Menon & Leviting, 2005). Even in cases of brain damage, music plays a therapeutic impact. Because music is processed on the right side of the brain and language is processed on the left, music therapy can help bridge the gap between the two by building new neurological pathways (Sashitzky, 2020). That being said, music sculpts itself as a crucial health agent with benefits that exceed expressive and entertainment purposes.



## **UN Perspective and Initiatives: Music as a Tool to Achieve SDGs**

Pandemic lockdowns have given the world an opportunity to see the value of creation. The United Nations (UN) has designated 2021 as the "International Year of the Creative Economy for Sustainable Development," with UNCTAD, UNESCO, WIPO, UNIO, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) hosting an annual celebration (UNCTAD, 2021). UNCTAD Acting Secretary-General Isabelle Durant stated, "The creative industries are critical to the sustainable development agenda. They stimulate innovation and diversification, are an important factor in the burgeoning services sector, support entrepreneurship, and contribute to cultural diversity" (para. 4). In addition, "the United Nations designated 21 April as World Creativity and Innovation Day to raise the awareness of the role of creativity and innovation in all aspects of human development" (UN, 2021, para. 1).

As per the UNESCO report on culture and sustainable development, the UN (2021) highlighted the importance of incorporating the cultural and creative industries into growth initiatives. This is due to the \$2.25 billion in sales and 29.5 million jobs these industries provide worldwide. In order to reach more people and expose them to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN organizations have included music in projects, as well as encouraged music education in order to achieve additional SDG targets, to which Lebanon subscribes.

An example of these projects is *The Fifth Edition of the SDG Global Festival of Action* where the host of *Play Fair! Actioning Sustainability in the Music Industry* workshop, Shain Shapiro, the Group CEO of Sound Diplomacy and Executive Director of Center for Music Ecosystems stated that "Music can play a role in the advancement of the SDGs and music can play a role in making the world a better place economically, socially, and culturally" (Shapiro as cited in UNRIC, 2021, para. 3).

Caroline Petit, UNRIC's Deputy Director (as cited in UNRIC, 2021), stated "the music industry is a strong network that unites people across generations and can make a difference to the progress of global goals" (para. 4). The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) collaborated with the Playing for Change organization to create Peace Via Music: A Global Event for Social Justice, which aimed to bridge the gap between communities through music (UNFPA, 2020). Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund stated that "music is a tremendous vehicle to promote awareness about our global struggle for peace, justice, equality, and dignity — the noble goals of the United Nations" (para. 4). She further explains how music is a powerful and unifying language that not only builds bridges but also aids the advancement of social justice in all of its manifestations.

For instance, music that responds to issues of social justice provides the chance to stimulate citizenship and influence responsible political action (Sokoloff, 2005). Higgins (2015) stated, "With cultural democracy acting as a political compass, community music practice attempts to move toward the Others' call, not in the name of horizons of perfectibility and foreseeable ideals but, rather, in a response to the urgency of hospitable music making" (p.9). Higgins considers the nature of such practices to be personal and political. In fact, the approaches and outcomes of community music may be crucial in shaping the sociocultural surroundings of today (Higgins, 2015). Therefore, community music can be used to transform oppressive environments (Silverman & Elliott, 2018).

### **Current State of Music Education in Lebanon**

Fakhoury (1983) examined the Art Syllabi and their contents in Lebanese Teacher's Training Government College. The Fine Art Program, including music as one of its first-year subjects, states that its aim "is to prepare qualified teachers who would orient their students to

reach educational and artistic goals with great success and self-confidence in order to contribute to the future educational development in Lebanon” (p. 58). One of the courses offered by the Music Education Program is “Music Culture.” This course discusses the relationship between music and other fields of art.

As for the most recent statistics, The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE, 2017) in Lebanon confirms that there are 35 private universities and only one public university in the country. Yammine (2016) revealed on the Association Européenne des Conservatoires that only five out of the aforementioned institutions offer Higher Music Education. The government funds one of them while tuition fees fund the rest. Yammine also highlighted that the “curricula are created by the different institutions but have to be recognized by the government through the Minister of Education. Within the curricula the focus is on the study of instrumental and vocal training, by which the lessons are given one on one” (para. 3). As for the Pre-College Music Education System, Yammine confirms that prior to entering higher education, the level of student output in music programs is less than the required average for students to be qualified to enter professional music programs.

### **The Factors that Obstruct Music Education in Lebanon and the Region**

Several sociocultural and musicological viewpoints can be used to examine how musical traditions are taught and passed down from a generation to another (Danielson et al., 2001). Sometimes, centuries-old pedagogical systems coexist with contemporary methods, and in other instances, the transmission process causes a quick collapse in previously robust forms of expressive culture. When new types of transcription have been invented and subsequently abandoned or widely accepted, questions regarding "oral" and "written" transmission have been brought up again and time again. Many challenges have arisen from the transcription of song

lyrics and melodies into various notation systems where each tradition had to develop its own solutions (Danielson et al., 2001).

With the help of Egyptian musicologist Mamd Amad Al-ifn (1896-1973), music education was initially offered in Egyptian public schools beginning with the academic year 1931–1932 (Danielson et al., 2001). Since that time, Western music notation, solfège, and major and minor mode repertoire have taken center stage in the music curriculum in Egypt and Lebanon. Al-ifn also organized the Arab Music Conference of 1932, an international gathering where scholars and musicians from Europe and the Middle East documented specific aspects of Arab music performance practice, discussed its state, and suggested specific solutions to what were seen as urgent issues at the time. The conference's Music Education Committee advocated for the establishment of teacher preparation programs that could ensure a supply of qualified instructors as well as the inclusion of music instruction in all school grades (Danielson et al., 2001).

The Cairo National Conservatory (CNC) was established in 1959, marking the official introduction of Western music into Egypt's higher artistic education system (Danielson et al., 2001). This program was one outcome of a two-pronged cultural policy that was enacted after the 1952 revolution and was designed to maintain Egypt's cultural history while fostering "modernity," which was locally linked with Western cultural exports. In the 1980s, the CNC broadened the scope of its initial services by adding academic and musical curricula for grades K–12 as well as specialized undergraduate and doctoral programs in music performance, composition, and musicology (Danielson et al., 2001).

In Lebanon, Dr. Walid Gholmiyeh, the director of the Beirut Conservatory and one of Lebanon's leading composers, stated:

This year we have 4,800 students at the Conservatory. This is a huge number compared to the population of Lebanon and actually this is as many as we are able to take. This year we refused around 11,000 applicants. We cannot take them all. The motive for that, the reason behind that is that all parents want their children to study music as a way of letting them be introduced to culture, rather to tune them in a totally different track to the track of the war. (Levinson, 1998)

This shows that even when a big portion of the Lebanese society is willing to properly learn music, a lot of students do not get the opportunity to professionally pursue their passion. This confirms Yammine's (2016) claim that music curricula in schools are not good enough to meet the needs of the students.

### **The Effects of Culture and Religion on Music Education**

Regardless of its benefits, people do not universally view music through the same lens. In Lebanon, for instance, there are 18 (4 Muslim, 12 Christian, 1 Druze & 1 Jewish) recognized religious sects (Faour, 2007), which illustrate specific attitudes towards music. For example, Hood (2007) highlighted that the Druze sect has a certain perspective of music that resembles attitudes held by other sects in the Near East. She states, "The power of music to affect the emotions, and the association of music with physical pleasures, has made it problematic from the point of view of many religions, even though most make use of some sort of religious music or chanting" (p. 3). Different rules and expressions are used in order to distinguish between music used in a religious context and music used in secular settings (Hood, 2007). Hood further elaborates on the similarity between Islam, Druze and Orthodox Christianity in maintaining a firm separation "between sacred and secular music" (p. 3). She states, "There is an attitude among some Druzes that secular, and particularly instrumental, music has no place in religion"

(p.3). Regarding Islam, certain parts of al Hadith condemn music, despite the fact that the Qur'an does not expressly forbid it (Hood, 2007).

In her book, *Music Education and Muslims*, Harris (2006) reflects on the attitude of some Muslim parents towards music. Harris argues for more research on this topic as she claims that while it is impossible to assume that all Muslims are opposed to performing arts, music, dance, and drama in schools, there has been enough disquiet among Muslim communities to warrant further research. Harris addresses that, for some Muslims, music poses an ethical challenge, which must be acknowledged. However, to develop communication with Muslim parents who may be hesitant or uncomfortable with their child's participation in music instruction, music educators can first define music and contextualize their musical aims as some parents insist on avoiding being exposed to songs that talk about drugs, alcohol and rock n' roll (Izsak, 2013).

In Egypt, a culturally similar context to Lebanon, Harris (2006) reported that music still sparks debate even though it is part of Egypt's government school curriculum. The schools she saw were equipped with a few instruments. Many percussive instruments could be seen hanging on the preparatory music room's walls; however, the class was majorly focused on singing. The student's singing, though, was below standard where negligible attention was given to pitch. Nevertheless, there was one good singer who had private lessons and aimed to become a professional singer. As for the song choices, the majority of the 40 girls in class were singing either religious or nationalistic songs. These students were forbidden from singing pop songs, a genre they listened to at home (Harris, 2004). In brief, music appreciation and proper learning can be facing a barrier that guards some people's religious beliefs.

## **Ways to Enhance Music Education in Schools**

In his review of Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*, Hensen (2003) highlights the importance of bringing a fundamental change to postmodern music education where the main philosophy behind teaching music is lacking. Reimer (2003) argues that students need to, firstly, fully grasp the importance of active listening in music classes to develop appreciation for music and to be more prepared for higher levels of music training. This, in his belief, needs more attention from music educators and curriculum developers who can utilize music education as a tool to ensure enculturation and appreciation for diversity through exposing students to music genres from different cultures. He continues to argue that music classrooms can spark the interest of students in ways that transcend the challenging tasks of reading and performing music, which can be demotivating for students who get intimidated by the process.

In addition to setting a broader foundation for music classes, Clements (2010) emphasizes on the importance of music teachers adapting their tasks in order to meet the students' needs and learning styles. A uniform way of instructing can leave many students unmotivated, she argues. Clements further states that welcoming an open space for dialogue about the music under study is crucial not only in maximizing interest and engagement but also in triggering better cultural understanding and consequently, social transformation.

On the institutional level, Carpenter (2016) proposed that schools need to pay more attention to how they handle music programs in primary education. The author argues that investing in a music subject lead would prevent yearly switches of musically inexperienced staff members. This is vital to set a system in place and create familiarity with students. Allocating a proper yearly budget for music programs not only to equip classrooms but also provide music

training for teachers who can further develop their skills and stay motivated to improve their delivery and activities, she adds.

Victoria's Department of Education (2022) presents student-centered learning, progression and authenticity as main characteristics for quality music education. Reviewing and adapting activities throughout the learning process according to how students respond is found to enhance the outcome of music training. This is suggested to be done in way in which teachers ensure providing regular and constructive feedback to facilitate learning. Lastly, fostering authenticity within the students is crucial in shaping more appreciative individuals and more genuine musicians.

In addition to the instructional methods, Victoria's Department of Education (2022) recognizes the importance of establishing community links or partnerships with the community and the music industry in order to equip students with the needed skills, increase their motivation, and help make music part of the school culture. Moreover, this is a good opportunity to build a sense of responsibility in the students towards their community while doing something they are passionate about.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter two highlighted how UNESCO emphasizes holistic learning to achieve quality-learning outcomes. These outcomes are proven to be better achieved when music education is incorporated into the curriculum. The impact of music education on the brain and overall student learning is shown to be significant enough to consider. Additionally, as of 2020 and onwards, the UN has made efforts to showcase the relevance and impact of the creative industries not only on the economy but also on society as a whole. However, these initiatives are still in the early stages of fundamentally changing the existing narrative and challenges that



obstruct music education. The existing literature regarding the current state of music education in Lebanon indicates that budget cuts on fine arts programs in schools might stem from a cultural attitude that prioritizes STEM education and results in lower quality programs. Lastly, the chapter described tools that can enhance music education and potentially challenge the current narrative.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

In order to fully understand how teachers perceive the factors that impact music education, a qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized. Yin (2011) stated that “qualitative research covers contextual conditions - the social, institutional, and environmental conditions within which people’s lives take place. In many ways, these contextual conditions may strongly influence all human events” (p. 8). The goal of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific and to discover phenomena based on how the actors in this scenario perceive them (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Lester, 1999). In the human context, this usually corresponds to inductive and deductive methods to gain deep knowledge and insights.

Keen (1975) states how “we want not to see this event as an example of this or that theory that we have, we want to see it as a phenomenon in its own right, with its own meaning and structure” (p. 38). The basic orientation of phenomenological research aims to answer the “what” and “how” question and to highlight the dimensions of an experience utilizing descriptive ways (Valle & King, 1978). Phenomenological research is the most suitable choice for this research as it answers the research questions by exploring the challenges that music education in Lebanon faces and identifying potential methods to enhance its quality and overall standing within the education system. That being said, the phenomenon that this study addresses is the lack of recognition for music as a valuable subject and an overall low standard of music education among Lebanese schools.

### **Participants and Setting**

According to Palinkas et al. (2015), selecting in-depth interview participants based on purposive sampling ensures the maximization of data richness, which is essential to address the

research questions. Therefore, purposive sampling is suitable for selecting subject experts (Palinkas et al., 2015). Interviews with six experienced music teachers who provided multi-dimensional in-depth responses regarding music education in Lebanese schools were conducted. Convenient sampling was followed due to the low number of schools offering music education in light of the Lebanese economic crisis and post-Covid 19 pandemic dismantling of fine arts programs. The majority of the participants have multiple years of experience in music education. This ensured a lot of depth and provided data that is rich in awareness of different timelines and socio-cultural contexts. The participants' names were coded as shown in Table 1 to enhance confidentiality and protect their anonymity.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographics*

| <b>Education</b>       | <b>Current Position</b> | <b>Experience (Years)</b> | <b>Sex</b> | <b>Code</b>     |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| 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) |

**Data Collection Procedures**

The process of inquiry known as qualitative research describes the events that take place in a particular context and the views of the people involved in this medium in order to gather facts about a phenomenon (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). This procedure aids researchers in inductively evaluating the collected data to derive explanations. Understanding the viewpoints

of the individuals involved in certain events is the overarching purpose of qualitative research, which aims to explore a phenomenon via their observations. Since social conceptions are complex by nature, they are less likely to be understood using precise measurements, which is where the qualitative research approach fits into the "interpretivist paradigm" (Gorman & Clayton, 2005).

In order to explore the perspectives of music teachers in Lebanon and answer the research questions, in depth interviews were conducted in both Arabic and English, for ease of conversing, as in Lebanon, both are used interchangeably, during June-July 2023. The study, purpose and interview process were explained to all participants before obtaining their signature on the physical informed consent form. In order to leave room for a conversational build up, I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded on the researcher's phone and later translated/transcribed with the support of notes taken throughout the interviews through which probing questions were asked to gain more insight. Interviews were given a lot of attention and time to ensure very thorough discussions with well experienced and educated music instructors.

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing data using the thematic coding approach is done by sorting and identifying relationships among the collected data in order to draw meaning and illustrate thematic relationships (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). These relationships guide the analysis of the phenomenon under study. As discussed by Clark and Creswell (2014), thematic codes help researchers exemplify the drawn meanings from the research's central phenomenon.

After transcribing all interviews, the transcripts were read more than once in order to properly grasp the dynamic, thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. Then, the researcher

categorized the content according to relevance, impact and thematic relationships. The findings of the study were explained in light of these themes, the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study as well as the literature review. For that to happen, the text was manually coded and labeled based on themes in order to draw conclusions from the relationships noticed and/or communicated by the interviewees.

### **Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research**

During the course of this study, the five components of trustworthiness in qualitative research were taken into account. These components are credibility (internal validity), transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. The degree to which the findings of the study offer reasonable data and accurate interpretations in light of the participants' thoughts is referred to as credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To guarantee the use of this criterion, I urged participants to provide thorough examples and elucidation in response to my follow-up questions. The probability of transferring the results of a qualitative research to other contexts is represented by the second component, transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In order to facilitate transferability, enough details regarding participants and the setting were provided in order for the findings to be beneficial for other researchers. Dependability (audit trial) encompasses consistency and matching the process of analysis with the approved research design standards (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This was guaranteed by providing a transparent description of every step taken during the research. As for confirmability, or neutrality, I tried to analyze and report with full objectivity. Finally, reflexivity, "the process of critical self-reflection about oneself as researcher (own biases, preferences, preconceptions), and the research relationship (relationship to the respondent, and how the relationship affects participant's answers to questions" (p.121) was also ensured.

## **Protection of Human Participants**

The entire process was executed taking into consideration all the ethical aspects in qualitative research. Permission was obtained from the university IRB. In addition to that, approval from the schools was taken prior to requesting the contact information of the teachers and conducting the interviews with them.

The participants' right to privacy, confidentiality, safety and comfort were all respected. A written informed consent was obtained from the participants while communicating their right to withdraw from the process, if needed. If they want to withhold any information upon completion of the research, all findings will be available to all participants for their approval prior to final publication.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of this study is the low number (six) of participants. However, “an extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate” (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1). According to Morse (2000), the caliber of the data, the nature of the topic, the quantity of extracted information from each participant, and the qualitative methodology are all significant factors to consider. This study, regardless of the low number of participants, ensured the highest quality of data possible while exploring a significantly understudied topic.

Additionally, the interviews were conducted using the Lebanese mixture of Arabic and English languages to ensure comfort and a less formal setting. This might have affected the independent translation in a way that incorporated the researcher's style, while maintaining the content accuracy, of course. Even though, all participants shared very similar perceptions and obstacles as music educators, the research might have shed light on more aspects, further

enriching the collected data if the number of participants were higher. Lastly, the lack of resources found on music education in Lebanon limited the richness of the literature review sections that specifically discuss the Lebanese context. This might also have affected the depth of analysis in the discussion section.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

The findings of this study serve as a crucial chapter as they thoroughly contextualize the challenges facing music education globally in the Lebanese society and education system. Six music teachers participated in this study, all of whom are currently employed as music teachers in private schools in Lebanon, except for one, who recently retired after 27 years of teaching. The participants slightly differ in years of experience, education level and age, but they all hold a strong passion for music and teaching. The dedication they all have to their purpose as musicians, music teachers, and social agents enriched this study with great insight. The participants were chosen from six different schools in Mount Lebanon, among a pool of institutions that stopped offering music due to the Covid-19 pandemic and economic recession. In addition to suggesting unique recommendations to help in resisting the threats facing music education, the participants discussed these factors in-depth and in relation to various aspects. These results and recommendations were fundamental in uncovering potential directions for future research. The responses converged in five main themes, presented in this chapter and supported with quotes from the participants as supporting evidence.

### **Theme One: The Role of Music Education in Society**

Prior to presenting the challenges that face music education in Lebanon, the first theme highlights the ways in which music teachers perceive music. All participants vehemently expressed the importance and relevance of music in building a better Lebanese society by enhancing students' (1) communication skills and (2) holistic learning and well-being.

### **Communication, Collaboration, and Social Cohesion**

There was a collective agreement among the participants that, in order for the Lebanese society to get through the tensions that arise due to its extreme division, individuals need to



become better communicators and collaborators. They believe that teaching students music at schools helps in achieving social cohesion. Participant (B) mentioned, “We are people who scream a lot but we don’t listen. I wish we could listen more to each other. It is very important...Life is all about communication!” She elaborated, “When students learn music, they learn to listen. We need to listen more than we scream. Listening. Listening. Listening.” Participant (C) described how these tensions manifest outside of a musical context. He said, “When we talk politics, we fight. When we talk religion or any controversial topic, we fight. But when we talk about music, we party together on the following night. This is the Lebanese reality.” He also described how students fight about small things on stage, yet end up forgetting their differences once they watch a video of their performance. They start perceiving human relationships differently as they associate it with a beautiful outcome that they were all part of (C). Participant (E) believes that the goal of music education is not to solely form choirs for entertainment. For him, the goal of music education is to teach students how they can better communicate with one another as human beings. Participant (C) further argued that music is a fundamental factor in building healthy social relationships stating, “Musicians are deeply connected to society and culture”. For him, the easiest way to connect with people is through joy explaining how “When you open the door of joy in a music performance, you can make 200 friends in a minute. This is the power of music. It breaks barriers and blends you with society” (C).

The participants also emphasized how better communication skills enhance a collaborative mindset. They also agreed that people cannot go far places in their careers completely on their own. Participant (E) highlighted how “Musicians cannot function alone in the music industry and that teaching students about teamwork through music is crucial.” He

explained how even “solo artists” are never truly alone. “They still have a band. Even DJs nowadays are highly dependent on collaborations with other producers and singers to achieve greater success” (E). In summary, the participants agreed on how “Music shapes better human beings” and that “Proper music education helps build a generation that can guide the country to a better path,” Participant (F) explained.

### **Holistic Learning and Well-being**

In addition to enhanced communication skills and collaborative mindsets, music is believed to be an effective tool that ensures holistic learning and wellbeing among students.

The fine arts not only constitute general knowledge for students but they also sharpen the coordination between the hemispheres of our brain and our critical thinking, which we need in any field participant (A) explained. There was a student whose parents did not want her to attend music class, due to conservative religious beliefs, and wanted her to focus on becoming a doctor instead, participant (C) shared. However, the student showed extreme public speaking anxiety and failed in a spelling-bee competition where everyone bet on her. Participant (C) explained how he “talked to her dad and explained how music will help her become a better doctor and speaker. We, music teachers, are building individuals who are able to excel in any career they pursue.” This well roundedness can be witnessed among one of participant (B)’s newer students who “listened, understood and applied tasks very efficiently, in other subjects too, to realize later on that he already plays the violin.”

Additionally, music helps students with self-discipline. According to participant (E), individuals with behavioral difficulties are advised to learn an instrument. This way they contribute to a healthier environment for everyone around (E). This ripple effect is believed to stem from a deep connection that humans have with music, participant (E) explained.

Participant (D) argued that students need an environment to disconnect and express. She perceives the change they experience when listening to music or playing music to be “very important for their well-being.” Participant (C) supported this argument mentioning, “If you are an individual who decided to lock yourself in a room for 10 years, it takes a musical instrument and the desire to share this talent with others to get you out of this room.” Participant (F) described how he “stops existing” for a few moments while performing on stage. “It is a phenomenon, like meditation,” he added. The simple act of listening to music impacts our emotions and thought process, even when we don’t realize it. Furthermore, participant (F) stated, “Music is the perfect medium to channel our emotions, realize the power we hold, release stress, mirror the joy and heal in a way. Music is a medicine for all.”

## **Theme Two: Socio-Cultural Barriers**

### **Relationship Complexities Between Music Education, Culture, and Religion.**

One of the participants stated, “There is always this strange relationship between music and culture. People have different perspectives and attitudes towards the arts and pretty much everything” (A). Apparently, there are clashes when it comes to how people perceive music education due to “how diverse and divided Lebanon is when it comes to lineage, educational backgrounds, socio-economic backgrounds, religious beliefs, etc.,” participant (E) explained.

This coexistence of different cultures and levels of religiosity causes a non-unified attitude towards music learning. For example, on the one hand, the curiosity of learning and belief in education as a tool for success leaves a good number of students who appreciate music as a subject. However, many people “only listen to music not for the art of it but just to dance at parties,” according to participant (E). There are also some cultures in Lebanon that don’t have a radio in their homes and turn any music down when it comes (C). Participant (A) described

the relationship between music and culture as “a never-ending cycle”. There are a lot of people who truly understand and appreciate music. Participant (A) described this saying “I have students who go watch live music in events in Lebanon. But you also have people whose immediate reaction to music being: Oh, what they play at the commercial coffee shops!” Participant (F) argued that “The deterioration of music quality in the mainstream music industry has impacted our culture and how people perceive music. I find a strong relationship between the music we hear and the chaos we witness in our country.”

Regardless of this cultural mosaic, the participants highlighted a main issue in the perception of music as a tool for fun and prestige. Many parents say, “I want to get my child a piano, but it feels that they want to get it for decoration or to show off,” participant (A) explained. They do not expose them or teach them about different flavors in music and instruments. “What if their child likes the violin? Tuba bass? Oud?” participant (A) asked. Participant (A) insisted, “This is not how music works. Oriental instruments like qanun or oud are considered by many as old fashioned. Learning piano becomes a way to live the high-class life.” Participant (C) agreed on this point stating, “Prestige in our Lebanese society has killed the essence of education. Parents give importance to fame and confuse pop stars with ideal music educators that need to be teaching their children music at schools.” There are also parents whose motive for their kids learning music stems from their desire to witness their offspring perform on stage with famous people within an unrealistic time range. This mentality is also witnessed among the schools, which only care about students learning instruments and singing in a choir to impress the parents during the events. Participant (E) believes that “Some schools care a lot about prestige.”

As a result of this attitude, many people consider music to be a fun hobby instead of a learning subject or a discipline that could lead to financial success. Culture is still considered to be “very distant from taking music seriously as a subject,” participant (A) shared. Parents are afraid that their kids will become musicians and die from hunger. Basically, “Parents want their kids to play music but they don’t want them to become musicians, participant (E) explained. According to participant (F) many students end up being “the victims of such socio-cultural beliefs.”

### **Lack of Awareness on the Importance of Music as a School Subject**

Participants agreed that the root cause behind the current attitude towards proper music teaching is the lack of awareness among parents, schools, and leaders in education on the importance of music as a school subject. The reason why many students consider music to be a free class with no substantial importance stems from the lack of music education among the parents’ generation (E). Participant (A) elaborated on this point stating; “I imagine that the parents’ lack of knowledge in music is the reason behind their resistance to music assignments. How can they help their children study? God forbid their son or daughter gets a low grade” (A).

In addition to the parents’ lack of knowledge in music, the participants also believe that parents do not have the awareness needed to help music achieve its goals as a subject. Participant (C) highlighted how parents say things like “I want my child to learn mathematics to become an engineer and biology so they become a doctor.” He argued that 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 (F) explained how some parents request that their children do not learn theory while expecting them to learn an instrument. The other subjects are always more important for them, however, he claimed, “This

mentality is still there but is slowly changing.” He continued to quote the frequent saying “Music won’t feed you.” But that’s not true, he argued while sharing how he made money from music to be able to finish his degree in engineering.

This lack of awareness is also apparent among schools and leaders themselves. Even school administrations and leaders in education who think they know everything, are not aware of music’s importance, participant (C) argued. He believes that schools should not wait for students to reach the age where they start reading and writing and hit a wall if they have learning difficulties. Based on his specialization in teaching music for students with learning difficulties, Participant (C) argued that “music classes help identify any learning difficulties from early on. I play games with them to determine auditory perception.” Schools stop giving attention to music classes in order to improve students’ language skills and scientific knowledge failing to realize that music training is the tool to improve their performance in these subjects, he explained. Participant (D) stated, “In all schools you have this mentality of music classes being just for fun,” aligning with the experience of participant (E) who worked with a school whose only goal was for the students to have fun. He claimed, “They do not consider it as an essential school subject. This extra emphasis on events is very time consuming and takes away from the impact that music classes can have on these students beyond performing skills.” This is also reflected in the schools’ permission for intervention from other subjects where students are asked to leave the music class to have extra tutoring, participant (A) explained.

This issue is believed to be in the hands of leaders who have the power to change things in school administrations yet also do not possess the needed knowledge about music education (F). The reason behind that is the lack of enough research and initiatives in Lebanon. Equally important, participant (C) continued to argue, “If enough studies were done 50 years ago, the

Lebanese society would have been aware enough by now that music is not just for entertainment.”

**Recommendations**

**Table 2**

*Participants’ suggestions on how the socio-cultural barriers can be approached.*

| <i>Participants</i>           | <i>Suggestions &amp; Comments</i>   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>Participant (C)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More research.<br/><i>“Research contributes to the transformation of society.”</i></li> <li>• Music teachers need to educate parents and administrations about why students need to learn the subject in the first place.<br/><i>“It’s all about awareness.”</i></li> <li>• Involve parents in the process of learning so they can witness the impact of music classes on the students.<br/><i>“When parents are involved in the musical games and realize the lack of knowledge they have and experience, they start appreciating it through hands-on experience.”</i></li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Participant (F)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrich the art scene<br/><i>“We need to raise a generation that absorbs a lot of Art.”</i></li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Participant (A)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate, then advocate.<br/><i>“Teach them, they are in school to learn. They will start enjoying music more as a subject.”</i></li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Participant (D)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers need to make sure that students know exactly how they can solve their assignment when they go home.</li> <li>• Change the narrative<br/><i>“Teachers need to work with loyalty to music. In the end, we are responsible to change the narrative and inspire a more serious attitude towards music education. We also cannot leave more room for irresponsibility and disrespect.”</i></li> </ul>  |

### **Theme Three: Institutional Barriers**

#### **Education System in Lebanon and Funding**

The participants expressed disappointment in decisions taken by the Lebanese Ministry of Education, which affected budget allocations for fine art programs. Participant (A) explained how during his college years, he got excited about the adoption of fine arts into the new curriculum in 1997. However, recent graduates were later banned from taking the exam for the Civil Service Bureau and become employed by the government after they canceled the agreement in 2006 to save money and remove fine art programs from the Lebanese education system. According to participant (A), teaching students art, in turn, influences the humanity of students “but look at education. Everything was affected since then.” Schools do not care about music because the government does not care. If it did, “they would consider the coefficient of fine arts in the official exams, which all Lebanese students have to take,” participant (C) shared.

Participant (C) continued to blame the government for its lack of initiative regarding proper music education programs from early on. There is no attention given to the personal development of students on the emotional and creative levels. Additionally, participant (A) highlighted how sectarianism in Lebanese law also contributes to the disparity among Lebanese schools. Each sect has the right to have its own school and this creates a division among the culture of schools affecting the general perception and quality of music education in schools, he added. Participant (F) believes that the Ministry of Culture is not exerting enough effort to revive the arts and culture in Lebanese communities.

The impact of these decisions manifests in low salaries and budget cuts in times of economic instability. Participant (F) wondered, “Why are our skills and years of experience not



considered?” Participant (C) mentioned that till this day, the government hasn’t paid pending salaries for music teachers who fulfilled a contract to teach fine arts stating, “They don’t see us.” In addition, the economic crisis in Lebanon has severely impacted not only education in general, but the music scene in Lebanon overall and specifically music education at schools, participant (E) shared. This crisis reduced the salary of a music teacher from \$1500 to \$260 per month, according to Participant (A). Moreover, many fine arts teachers were laid off during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participant (C) expressed how “that shows how much schools actually care about the arts. The first teacher to be let go is the music teacher when a school hits an economic crisis.”

Lastly, this lack of attention and funding to music programs has been one of the main obstacles that teachers face at school while dealing with limited resources: few instruments, reducing the number of music sessions per week, and the absence of music rooms in many cases. One music session per week “is not enough,” according to participant (A).

### **School Leadership and Absence of Music Coordinator Positions**

Schools are not well prepared to handle proper music education. Participant (A) highlighted how regardless of the music concerts and activities they do at school, there is demotivation and a call for slowing down when the administration compares itself to other schools who are doing less when it comes to the arts. He also expressed, “You reach a point where you feel helpless to change on a bigger scale. There is lack of teacher authority in exerting pressure that can transform the learning experience.” There isn’t much voice for music teachers in the midst of a system that prioritizes other subjects, participant (A) shared.

All participants seemed to struggle in the absence of music program coordinators who could be in a better position to improve the standard of music education at schools. Participant

(C) expressed, “Where is the curriculum? Where are the books? Who is supervising me in school?” Participant (F) stated, “How come a non-specialized coordinator is the one who supervises the music teachers?” No one is watching to assess if music teachers are up to standard or not inside the classrooms, participant (C) added. Schools usually assess the success of their music program when the school choir sings nicely at the end of year concert. That, for them, means that the music class achieved its goal, he argued. Participant (E) further elaborated on how the absence of a specialized coordinator leaves inexperienced music teachers like him, in a position of designing a whole curriculum for all the grades. He expressed that “the workload becomes very heavy and I’m also not experienced enough to be in charge of it.” This heavy workload is also often met with lack of appreciation, participant (D) shared.

Participant (A) gave a detailed example regarding the effect of having non-specialized supervisors over music teachers with little authority. Detailed lesson plans were required from him, incorporating specific scripts for each activity, which he considers to be “very ineffective.” He continued to argue, “I don’t approve of this for it limits my creativity and doesn’t take into consideration different levels of understanding and student characters. Preparing a lesson plan for each section is also not the solution for it only serves paperwork requirements.” He strongly believes that spontaneity is important in music teaching, adding, “I have to adapt. Why did we study psychology and methodology in university? I don’t know how to act. I have certain objectives and I’m fully responsible for students to grasp the concepts well.” What teachers do inside the classroom should not be so robotically scripted, he argued saying, “My life is based on improvisation to serve what is needed.”

## **Lack of Qualified Music Educators**

Low salaries in universities that teach music education caused many good teachers to leave the institutions or even emigrate from the country. The Lebanese University reduced the coursework and number of years to obtain a degree in music education, which affected the well roundedness and proficiency in teaching. Participant (A) described some situations as “heartbreaking to witness” where musicality is simply not good enough. He continued to express how “it is not understandable why the standard has become this low. There is no talent, no knowledge, and no ambition to improve themselves as learners and musicians.”

Those who graduate with degrees in music education but aren’t good musicians end up making a lot of mistakes as music teachers, participant (C) argued. Participant (E) supported this mentioning, “Some of my classmates in college were not even passionate about music. It felt like they were only doing it just for the sake of it. No passion. Some still don’t know music theory. How are they supposed to teach other students?” Participant (C) highlighted another issue and described it as “a disaster when schools hire a music teacher just because they are good musicians. This issue is scary in our education system.” He emphasized on asking whether they are “music educators or just good musicians.” Additionally, there is some arrogance among musicians who believe that if they perform with pop stars like Nancy Ajram, then they are qualified enough to teach music in a school, participant (A) argued.

According to participants (D) and (F), some teachers don’t teach with loyalty and conscience, and schools care about the image and fame of musicians confusing them with the right educators.

## Recommendations

**Table 3**

*Participants' suggestions on how the institutional barriers can be approached.*

| <i>Participants</i>    | <i>Suggestions</i>   |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Participant (A)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Music teachers/graduates need to be passionate and willing to go above and beyond</li><li>• Design a professional development program tailored to music teachers</li><li>• Hire specialized music program coordinators</li></ul> |
| <b>Participant (B)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher development workshops</li><li>• More supportive school leadership</li></ul>  |
| <b>Participant (C)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher quality degrees in music education</li></ul>  |
| <b>Participant (D)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct teacher development workshops</li><li>• Ensure support and communication with school administration</li></ul>  |
| <b>Participant (E)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide two weekly music sessions per class</li><li>• Hire a music program coordinator to ensure high quality</li></ul>  |
| <b>Participant (F)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure open communication between teachers and administration.</li><li>• The Ministries of Education and Arts and Culture need to change the narrative and promote holistic learning.</li></ul>                                  |

## **Theme Four: Student Motivation**

In the middle of all the challenges that face music teachers in Lebanon, the participants described how they shift their focus towards the classroom and ensure student motivation and interest while learning music. Their efforts align with the five principles of the humanistic learning theory: engagement, holistic learning, student choice, self-assessment and maintaining a safe learning environment.

### **Engagement**

In order to foster engagement in their classes, the participants focus the elements of individuality, play, and diversifying content (incorporating technology).

### **Individuality**

There is always a key to every student, participant (A) believes. Participant (B), for example, used to choose songs that were appealing to the students and musical works that have dialogue in them. “They loved these things. It engaged them a lot” (B). Exposing students to different genres and instruments that do not reach them through commercial songs is another way of providing an exploration of individual interests among the students, participant (A) explained.

Another way to honor student’s individuality, participants (A) and (B) emphasized on the importance of acknowledging fast learners or students who take private music lessons and giving them extra tasks that align with their level.

Participant (A) also shared:

In early grades, we always have new students with different backgrounds. For example, Lebanese students who are coming back from Venezuela have limited knowledge in music as well as language barrier. This puts me in the position to act upon

their situation. If I ignore them, they will hate music. Instead, I find a way to involve them through their Spanish language.

### **Games**

Activities help music students perceive theory differently. Some students do not like music “but every child in the world likes to play,” according to participant (C). The good teacher knows this and incorporates different subjects and elements to bring playfulness to the music classroom and engage everyone, not only musically talented students or those interested in the subject. Participant (D), for example, focuses on rhythmic exercises that involve games. She claimed, “For them it doesn’t feel like studying. They enjoy it. It is still work but they do not perceive it the same way.” Exercises like backwards reading and collaborative work, like canon singing, are also given to ensure engagement, participant (A) shared.

### **Diverse Content**

Some schools are afraid to pressure students with music theory and repel them, but it is very slow paced in schools; “there is no need to panic,” participant (E) suggested. Students will not be annoyed by learning music concepts if the content is diversified. Participants (E) and (A) explained that incorporating music history in an engaging way inspires students with stories of musicians and how instruments evolved throughout time.

Participant (D) stated, “I always try to come up with new ideas that amount to their desires and expectations. I recently started incorporating technology. Students now use an engaging application to learn concepts and have a station designated for music listening.” Participant (B) strongly encouraged the incorporation of technology in music classrooms as she witnessed great improvement and engagement after they provided a computer and a MIDI keyboard for every student to assist them in learning music theory.

## **Holistic Learning**

Participants believe that music is related to different subjects and aspects of individuals. For that, they approach their classes in a way that students can make these connections. For example, Participant (A) shared, “I studied music because I love math, physics, art and literature.” The same poem that takes the students seven Arabic sessions per week to memorize, takes them one music session to fully memorize it with joy, according to participant (C). He wondered, “How do parents still say: No, we want our kids to learn languages not music?” Participant (E) also stated, “You can inspire math enthusiasts through music by highlighting the connection between the two. You can inspire a math lover to pursue math through music.” Participant (A) also shared how he used music and art in a play to highlight the importance of mental health and the effects of social media on it.

In addition to these connections, Participant (C) highlighted the importance of using the multisensory approach, which proved its relevance and impact on the quality of learning. Participants (C) shared, “If you know what the students care about, you will excel as a teacher. Passive learning has no place anymore in our modern times.” In agreement with him, Participant (E) insisted on the importance of visual stimulations as a means to engage students more holistically, especially, when followed by inspiring and engaging storytelling.

## **Student Choice**

Logically, when students take a decision on their own and assume ownership of their learning, they will be more engaged in the learning process. Participant (E) argued that top down approach does not work with students, especially in subjects like music. It takes time and it is challenging but teachers can reach a point in the end where everybody wins. In support of this argument, participant (C) shared, “If you have a fixed plan that you don’t agree to go out of,

then you're a train and not a teacher." Individual differences are crucial to consider and "music teachers need to be like an elastic band and not make any student feel alienated." Honoring students' requests as much as possible makes them feel important and motivated, participant (D).

Participants provided the following examples of how they ensure student choice inside their classes. Participant (A) stated:

I always ask for their opinion. What do you feel like doing? Do you want to transpose the song? I give them the space to share their thoughts and suggestions so they don't feel that they are passive learners. They start having fun. For younger students, I play with them and then I play calm music if they are hyper and not able to focus. If they are sleepy, we start jumping. I use my "Magic Microphone" so they can meet me halfway. You never know what they went through during the day. Maybe they are bored, feeling hot. I always try to bring them to my own world while acknowledging what they need. If a student doesn't feel like playing the xylophone, they choose the instrument they want to practice. However, when performance time comes, I treat them all in the same seriousness.

Similarly, participant (C) shared:

If I start an activity and realize that students didn't like it, I stop. I get their feedback at the end of each class to assess what worked and what didn't. I gather them and act accordingly. I enjoy listening to students sharing their perspectives. This generation is very bright and they need to be heard so they can better guide the learning process.

Equally important, participant (D) explained:



I had one student who wasn't in the mood to do any music related activity, I told him it is fine and sent him to the sports teacher so he can let out his stress. This way I won him, and he came back the next session more motivated to learn and climb the ladder in his music-learning journey step by step.

### **Self-Assessment**

Participant (E) emphasized that strict grading being the only form of assessment is very demotivating for students. Some teachers have nothing to do other than yelling and taking off grades as a form of punishment. Participant (C) agreed stating, "I don't like it when grades become a demotivation for students. I don't like my students to get traumatized from the grading system." Grades should not create fear and "everything is about balance", participant (F) explained.

In order to avoid creating this fear inside their music classrooms, the participants shared the following examples:

Participant (D) stated:

I film their final performances and show it to them at the beginning of the following year and ask them what they think they should improve and reflect on how they improved from previous times, too. This space for reflection and self-assessment motivates them to give better in every performance or competition they have throughout the year.

Participant (F) believes that "getting students on stage to perform is a great way for them to witness their progress when the audience interacts and praises their work." He encourages and highlights any small progress witnessed so that students can pay attention to how they have improved. "Every word matters," he added.

## **Safe-Learning Environment**

Maintaining a safe learning environment is important for participants, as they believe such learning environment assists students to enjoy the learning process and feel respected as individuals. Participant (A), for example, gave importance to demonstrating accountability as a teacher saying, “When I promise them something, I do it.” He further explained:

I use terms like “you’re close.” There is nothing called “you’re wrong” in my class. I use phrases like “Of course you can try!” and “yalla” with a smile, with a heart. I also don’t give too much attention to instrument learning to alleviate unnecessary competition. I focus on activities that will work with at least 90% of the class. Even if I have a Bach in my class but they happen to be a bully, I don’t let them help others. I do that with those who have the responsibility of collaboration to enhance the learning for everyone without verbally highlighting the difference in level. Group work through which I try to get them closer to each other is crucial for me.

Likewise, participant (B) stated:

The etiquette of the music environment is based on respect and morals. They feel good about themselves that they are being good students and that used to attract them to what they were about to learn in the class. Younger students enjoyed the calmness inside the music classroom where they felt safe and de-stressed from other subjects.

Positive reinforcement, affection and establishing a relationship that is based on personal respect were essential to maintain a healthy learning environment.

Participant (C) emphasized on having the importance of having a great relationship with students, “I love them, from the bottom of my heart, and they can feel it.”

## Recommendations

**Table 4**

*Participants' suggestions on how students can be more motivated to learn music.*

| <i>Participants</i>    | <i>Suggestions</i>  |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>Participant (A)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build on individual interests and backgrounds of students</li></ul> |
| <b>Participant (B)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorporate technology</li></ul>                                    |
| <b>Participant (C)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure multi-sensory and holistic learning</li></ul>                |
| <b>Participant (D)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Let students see their progress and reflect on it</li></ul>         |
| <b>Participant (E)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Incorporate storytelling and engaging visuals</li></ul>             |

## Chapter Summary

The chapter detailing the study's findings presents four overarching themes, extracted from converging responses by the participants. In their responses, the participants identified that the main obstacles facing music education in Lebanese schools transcend the context of the institution and include socio-cultural barriers that intersect with the Lebanese education system and leaderships decisions. These factors, even though they manifest inside the classroom, are rooted in a deeper multi-faceted paradigm.

Participants highlighted the importance of music for individuals and society and indicated the socio-cultural barriers that challenge it from fulfilling its potential. These barriers position music within the limitations of entertainment, stripping it from its impact due to

prominent lack of awareness of the subject. The participants attributed this lack of awareness to the understudy of music as a subject among the parents' generation, the lack of research on music education in Lebanon, and most importantly, the decision of the Lebanese Ministry of Education to dismantle the fine arts from the education system, which shifted the public attention from them as subjects, deeming them less important for achieving student success.

Additionally, participants shed light on the need of better-qualified music teachers and university music education programs who can, in their own way, shift the narrative within the school and join the teachers in advocating for a better music teaching and learning experience within the schools.

All in all, the study's findings show that music teachers in Lebanese schools encounter a variety of challenges, including socio-cultural, institutional, economical, educational and political challenges, in order to assume a higher standard for music education and provide a better experience and outcome for teachers, students, schools, and society.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter begins with a general overview of the findings. The challenges reported by the participants are analyzed and discussed in the light of the constructivist and humanistic learning theories, which emphasize the holistic experience of students as they strive to achieve a self-actualized version of themselves. Furthermore, the chapter reflects on other research presented in the literature review chapter.

This study explored the challenges that music teachers face in Lebanon and the factors that assist them while facing these challenges. The findings demonstrated, in the first theme, strong views among music teachers regarding the role of music not just within the classroom but also in society. Even though these views align with some parents and students, the second theme highlighted that the main struggle participants face while teaching is a prevalent attitude that underestimates the value and role of music. This theme continued to find that people underestimate music due to their overwhelming lack of awareness of music's various benefits. Although it is difficult to discern whether this lack of awareness was the reason behind governmental decisions to limit music education as a school subject, or vice versa, the two seem to be highly interconnected.

The third theme explored the intersection between the Lebanese Ministry of Education's decision to dismantle fine art programs from the education system and school attitudes and decisions regarding funding and other aspects when it comes to music education. The findings showed that with limited authority to change a whole culture and influence government decisions, music teachers in Lebanon follow engaging methods with students in order to maintain student interest in music and optimize the benefits that come from learning music.

Despite a sense of hopelessness, due to external factors, music teachers demonstrated resilience and a belief in change, even if on a small scale.

**Question One: What are the socio-cultural factors that challenge and advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?**

According to the constructivist learning theory, the socio-cultural background of Lebanese students asserts a major influence on their attitude towards learning music, their prior knowledge about it, and their motivation to learn it (Bada, 2015). The participants' consensus over the challenge they face in dealing with students' attitudes and beliefs about music itself shows why music education in Lebanon has been fundamentally challenged. Even though participants agreed that some students appreciate music as a subject, they also highlighted how the lack of awareness among the parents' generation resulted in a big number of students who do not take music class seriously. This challenge seems to be one of the biggest reasons behind the slow progress of music education in the country. However, participants showed that they are resisting this narrative by ensuring that students find meaning in their music learning experience.

According to the constructivist principles, the student experience while learning also impacts their music study (Shively, 2015). In fact, participants are not depending on the attitudes and beliefs of students to have a good learning experience. Instead, participants focus their energy on providing a medium of exploration and good learning experience, which they hope, will change the attitudes and beliefs of not only the students but also their parents and the school. Van Manen (1991) uses the following metaphor to highlight the importance of teachers' awareness of their students' background. In the metaphor, she argues that students are not expected *to cross the street* to reach the teacher. Instead, it is teachers who must cross the street

to understand what and how students see from their side. Shively (2015) stated in agreement, “Whether we are thinking about the ways we experience music or the musics we experience, we need to cross over to meet our students where they are most comfortable, spend time there, and enter into a conversation about where we might travel together” (p.132).

Even though the participants are aware of this and are acting accordingly, student attitudes and beliefs regarding music education is still a major factor obstructing an ideal music learning process from happening in the country. It is also worth mentioning that this not the case with all other music teachers in the country. One of the major findings of this study is the collective agreement that there are not enough qualified music teachers. Some of the participants described the case as “disastrous”. So, the question here presents itself: “Is it enough what the participants are doing within their classrooms to lead to a fundamental shift in the public narrative regarding music education?”

**Question Two: What are the institutional barriers that music teachers face in K-12 Lebanese schools?**

While looking at the other factors that the participants highlighted in their responses, it becomes evident that the complexity surrounding music education requires collective action, not just from teachers but also from schools and leaders in education. In order for music education to truly advance, all responsible stakeholders can play a significant role in transforming the reality of music learning at schools. For instance, amid the efforts of change exerted by the participants, there is a sense of helplessness from the incapability to change things on a bigger scale. That being said, music teachers in Lebanon are found to be fighting for their cause on their own. If the schools — among the few that even offer music education — that hired them lack the knowledge and will to give the needed space for music programs to flourish, how can

music teachers go more above and beyond while they do not even have a music program coordinator to work with on initiatives that transcend the limits of teaching? If the Ministry of Education still does not believe in the relevance and importance of fostering creativity, well-being, and holistic learning among the students, how can a few music teachers who do not get paid enough change the attitude of a complex Lebanese society?

Northouse (2010) states, “Leadership includes attention to common goals. Leaders direct their energies toward individuals who are trying to achieve something together” (p.3).

Alongside a combination of interrelated challenges and responsible entities, transformational leadership seems to be missing among the Lebanese leaders that music educators are trying to communicate with. Participants expressed the same frustration with the Ministry of Education’s decision to dismantle art subjects from the curriculum and with the schools that do not provide well designed, equipped, and supported music programs. In both contexts, the issue lies in individualistic approaches that overlook the needs of students, teachers, and the Lebanese society. Lebanon’s vibrant music scene and the society’s appreciation for creative expression (Fanack, 2010) are non-official communicated needs that leaders in education are either surprisingly not aware of or simply disregarding. In the absence of decisions that acknowledge the efforts of music teachers and understand their vision, it is evident that the participants are determined to teach active listening, enhance communication skills, and inspire collaborative mindsets in order to build future leaders who can make decisions based on the needs of others, and ensure collective well-being, prosperity and self-actualization. As Kouzes and Pozner (2003) said, “Leadership is a relationship” in which modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart are core practices of exemplary leadership (p.3).



In addition to their leadership role, participants of this study demonstrated attention to holistic learning to a great extent. Their responses to each of the following questions aligned with the corresponding principle of the humanistic learning theory.

**Question Three: How can *student choice* advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?**

Following their conviction of music learning enhancing listening and communication skills, the participants are leading by example as they make sure to listen to their students as much as possible. The participants' honoring of student choice effectively demonstrates the active listening they want to teach in their classroom. They all agree on the importance of giving students the space to take decisions, when needed. Even though, they consider this approach to increase students' motivation, they still acknowledge that it needs to be controlled.

Huitt (2009) discusses this point stating, "Choice does not mean total choice all the time" (p. 5). According to him, the main goal from giving students a choice in their learning process is to provide the least restrictive environment possible to ensure a positive learning environment. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the self-determination theory considers autonomy as one of the three essential needs for social development, growth and integration. Beymer and Thomson (2015) further argue that "Choice, acknowledgement of feelings, increased perceived locus of control and opportunities for self-direction can enhance intrinsic motivation because they promote feelings of autonomy" (p 107).

Considering the number of students in the classroom (20-30), the low number of music sessions per week (1), and the challenges that teachers already face with socio-cultural and institutional barriers, this question could have been further investigated with the participants to determine the limitations of student choice in the current Lebanese situation.

#### **Question Four: How does fostering engagement advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?**

The participants showed a strong belief in the importance of treating each student as a unique individual, rather than regarding the classroom as one large passive learner. Their creative solutions to various levels of interests range from honoring the individuality of interests, personalities, and cultural backgrounds to incorporating engaging technology as a way to keep up with their generation. The responses, however, were unique to each teacher and the findings suggest that there is no unified agreement on how these individualities can be honored. Even though, each one succeeds in achieving it with certain students, or certain aspects of all the students, it is important to consider how the individuality of each student can be explored in the first place and properly honored, secondly.

For instance, Karthikeyan (2013) emphasizes that teachers need to understand students thoroughly. Such understanding is not only crucial for student motivation as a result of personalized learning but also helps in developing an inclusive and accepting environment (Andonovska-Trajkovska, 2016). Adopting an inclusive mindset inside the classroom serves as a catalyst for better intercultural communication and tolerance, which in their turn develop the social system, Andonovska-Trajvoska (2016) argues. In the Lebanese context, this principle is very needed as it can help bridge the gaps between different Lebanese identities and realities within the classroom, then outside. That being said, teachers need to be mindful and genuinely embody the inclusive mindset, and apply it through honoring the individuality.

That being said, the question raises itself regarding how the students feel towards the followed approaches by Lebanese music teachers in attempt of such understanding and how

teachers can better understand their students from early on in an effective way that ensures more inclusivity and personalized learning.

**Question Five: How can self-evaluation advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?**

Panadero et al. (2016) defined self-evaluation as a “wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe and possibly assign merit or worth to the qualities of their own learning processes and products” (p. 804). According to most humanistic teachers,

Grading students encourages students to work for the grade, instead of doing things based on their own satisfaction and excitement of learning. Routine testing and rote memorization don’t lead to meaningful learning in this theory, and thus aren’t encouraged by humanistic teachers. Humanistic educators help students perform self-evaluations so they can see how students feel about their progress. (WGU, para.11)

Even though participants agreed on the importance of giving feedback to students so they can better witness and reflect on their progress in music, their perspectives regarding grading music in the first place are not all the same. Three of the participants believe that music should be graded in schools and have a calculated coefficient in their reports in order for students and parents to take the subject more seriously. The other three participants believe that, in order for students to love the subject and learn to appreciate it, schools need to alleviate the pressure of grading a subject that they perceive as fun. However, these perspectives both stem from the participants’ determination to focus on guiding the students, parents and schools to a place where music education is more appreciated. That being said, the ideal assessment for music education in Lebanese schools still requires further investigation, due to lack of elaboration throughout the interviews on the matter.

**Question Six: How does honoring student feelings and knowledge advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?**

Aristotle stated, “educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” The effectiveness of engaging all aspects of the students is too crucial to undermine. For instance, Johnson (2014) argues that involving the entire human being in the learning process is the goal of humanistic learning and that affective education not only incorporates emotions but also teaches about them. He further highlights that “emotions, relationships, creativity, imagination, intuition, and real life problems are all part of the human experience” (p. 6) and that students should draw connections between what is learned and how it impacts them personally and those around them.

This holistic approach is well applied by the participants. Participants use multi-sensory activities, utilize songs that have a collective nostalgia and relatability, share with them inspiring stories, reflect with them and most importantly relate music concepts to aspects of their lives in and out of school. The participants showed appreciation and awareness of holistic learning as a means to enhance student motivation, engagement, development and well-being.

**Question Seven: How can creating a safe learning environment advance music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon?**

Bolman and Deal (2009) describe Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as one of the most influential theories about human needs and how these needs affect performance. Safety, the second fundamental necessity, is very important for progress to take place. Johnson (2014) argues, “What should it profit a person if s/he should gain the whole world but lose his or her soul? What should it profit our students if they produce test scores in the top

percentiles but don't understand who they are?" (p. 7) When schools become too competitive and about measuring up, you inevitably create a group of people that experiences failure, he elaborates.

The participants' determination to maintain a healthy environment and preserve the essence of a music environment helps portray music in its truest essence. Participants showed a heightened sense of empathy and understanding of the delicacy of human beings, especially, in a music setting. However, the case might not be the same in music classes led by non qualified music teachers who do not have a proper background in Music Education and the human psychology or simply the same experience in teaching. The ideal conditions of music education which the participants are aware of and strive to enhance might be missing in the schools that dismantled music programs since the Covid-19 pandemic who might hire good musicians, but not the right music educators as the participants expressed worryingly. It is common for recent graduates to have plenty of room for improvement. However, considering that schools lack specialized music program coordinators to guide the teaching and learning process, where does that leave students with a particular attitude toward music classes?

### **Recommendations**

The findings serve as a good reference for music educators in Lebanon, and countries with similar challenges, to assess their performance and adopt alternative methods to their teaching as a step towards enhancing the overall quality of music education in schools. This section provides recommendations, in light of these findings, for music educators, school administrations, and policymakers to consider while working towards the betterment of teaching and learning, individuals, and societies.

- More research on music education in Lebanon is recommended in order to highlight the importance of effectively incorporating fine arts into the Lebanese education system.
- The Ministry of Culture can collaborate with university art majors to produce a documentary/social media campaign/art events dedicated to discuss and promote music education.
- The findings suggest a new discussion to be opened with the Lebanese Ministries of Culture and Education, aimed at not only advancing the overall quality of education but also setting the intention to contribute to the flourishing of the Lebanese society, reclaiming the country's position as the capital of Arab culture.
- School administrations searching for ways to provide a holistic learning experience for their students to achieve better student and school results on various fronts are recommended to upgrade their system. This is an opportunity to adopt the arts into the curriculum, not as means of entertainment, but as an investment in future leaders and as a contribution to building more efficient, communicative, and collaborative communities. This can be achieved by hiring specialized music program coordinators and create a school culture that does not undermine music.
- Music educators in Lebanese schools can consider collaborating on music events to promote school collaboration and social cohesion. They can also lead initiatives that aim to spread awareness about music as a school subject. Additionally, they can design specialized professional development workshops for less qualified teachers in order to bridge the gap between teaching competencies.
- Founding art committees in school/university led events is recommended in order to promote inclusive learning and represent students who better flourish in an artistic

medium. Such committees not only can integrate art with academia but also can negotiate and advocate for the reconsideration of art programs' budget allocations, adjust teaching and learning approaches to be more art inclusive.

### **Future Scope of the Research**

Building on this thesis, future scholarly work can take several paths, including the replication of the study utilizing different methodologies, the development of the study's theoretical contribution, and conducting comparative research focusing on a larger sample of participants representing various cultural and educational backgrounds and different levels of experience. This thesis demonstrates existing issues within the schools, society, and the Lebanese education system. Firstly, there is a need to conduct a quantitative study that illustrates the number of schools offering music classes. Secondly, it would be intriguing to investigate, through a qualitative study, school administrations' perspectives on music education from educational and logistical viewpoints. Thirdly, a study that explores the socio-cultural barriers that this study shed light on would also be a significant contribution to the scant research. Lastly, the exploration of possible initiatives that leaders in education can take in order to help advance music education in Lebanon would lead to a more thorough and inclusive understanding of the issue while advocating for solutions at the same time.

## **Conclusion of the Study**

Despite music educations' positive impact on student learning and society, music education still faces challenges that prevent it from fulfilling its potential. This phenomenological qualitative study aimed to understand what the main factors challenging and advancing music education in Lebanon are. Unfortunately, music is prominently perceived as an entertainment tool with underestimated educational benefits. 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. The efforts exerted by music teachers inside the classroom would be futile, or not enough, for Lebanon to reclaim its position as a pioneer in the arts and a medium that highly values education.

In conclusion, while music proved to be an essential educational subject which 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 proper inclusion of music within the Lebanese education system.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: IRB Approval



Case# 2022-2023-278

**To: Khaldoun Abou Dargham  
Ibrahim Karkouti  
Dena Riad**

**From: Heba Kotb  
Chair of the IRB  
Date 18/6/2023**

**Re: IRB approval**

---

This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled

“Teachers’ Perceptions of the Factors that Obstruct and Advance Music Education in K-12 Schools: A Qualitative Study in Lebanon ”

It required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. Your proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.

This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.

This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.

A small rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "H. Kotb".

Heba Kotb  
IRB chair, The American University in Cairo  
2078 HUSS Building  
T: 02-26151857

**Institutional Review Board**  
The American University in  
Cairo  
AUC Avenue, P.O. Box 74  
New Cairo 11835, Egypt.  
tel 20.2.2615.1000  
fax 20.2.27957565  
Email: [irb@aucegypt.edu](mailto:irb@aucegypt.edu)

## Appendix B: English Consent Form

**Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study**

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**Project Title:** Teachers' Perceptions of the Factors that Obstruct and Advance Music Education in K-12 Schools: A Qualitative Study in Lebanon

**Principal Investigator/Researcher:** Khaldoun Abou Dargham, MA Candidate

Email: [khaldounadargham@aucegypt.edu](mailto:khaldounadargham@aucegypt.edu)

Cell Phone: (+961) 76-369482

\*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research is to elicit music teacher's perceptions of the factors that advance and obstruct music instruction in Lebanese schools. The findings may be presented and published. The expected duration of your participation is maximum one hour.

\*The procedures of the research will be as follows:

In-person interviews will be conducted at the participant's workplace to gather the data for this study. Each interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes and will be scheduled at the participant's convenience. Permission will be taken for the interview to be audiotaped on the researcher's cell phone. The recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer for a minimum of 3 years (as per AUC IRB's policy). The transcribed data will be shared with the participants for their final review and consent.

\*There *will not be* certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

\*There *will be* benefits to you from this research. Participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the scant research on music education in Lebanon and learn more about the factors that might enhance their experience as music educators within their schools.

\*The information you provide for purposes of this research is confidential. And your identity will be protected and hidden by using pseudonyms.

\**Questions about the research, your rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to Khaldoun Abou Dargham at +96176369482*

\*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

By signing below, you affirm that you have been informed and consent to be a participant in the above-described study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Interview Questions



### Research Interview Questions

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**Project Title:** Teachers' Perceptions of the Factors that Obstruct and Advance Music Education in K-12 Schools: A Qualitative Study in Lebanon

**Principal Investigator/Researcher:** Khaldoun Abou Dargham, MA Candidate

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- How do you think the Lebanese socio-cultural and economic factors influence the attitudes of students and parents towards music education in K-12 schools in Lebanon? Do you think the Lebanese society is appreciative of music education? What are other factors that could obstruct music education in Lebanon?
  - What do you do to meet students' varying levels of interest and dedication to music education? How do you ensure student *engagement*?
  - What choices do students have in your music classes? What do you do to help students take ownership of their music learning?
  - How do you help your students assess their own progress in music? Do you think this impacts their motivation towards music learning?
  - Do you think that a holistic learning approach can better impact music students? Why?
  - What aspects of the students do you focus on other than technical music skills in your classes?
  - How can music teachers ensure that students with various interests explore their passion for music? What types of support do you provide your students to enhance their music skills?
  - How do you think music education impacts students and society? Can you provide any examples from your experience as an educator?
  - What are the main limitations/obstacles you face as a music teacher?
  - What recommendations would you give in order to for music education in Lebanon to advance?
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