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ABSTRACT

Musica Novum: A Study of the Music Education Offerings of Secondary Schools in Antigua and Barbuda During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Musica Novum is a study which sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the music education offerings of secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda during the COVID-19 Pandemic. For over a century, music had been included as part of the formal, general education curriculum in schools across the world. As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, many music education offerings worldwide were forced to find creative ways of teaching music to students in a virtual space. In Antigua and Barbuda, music education offerings were adapted in an attempt to meet the needs of students and teachers, despite the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Through a mixed methods research approach, this study explored the educational impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the music education offerings of secondary schools, with particular focus on students' and teachers' access to and use of technology, student engagement and assessment and the mental health of stakeholders within the education system. Online surveys and interviews were carried out with music students and teachers from a total of nine schools. Six of the participating schools were public, while two were private. A total of sixty-four students and thirteen teachers participated. The Curriculum Officer for Music and Theatre Arts, Mrs. Marion Byron. This research shows that there is a lack of access to the necessary resources in which to engage in virtual and blended learning, affecting both students and teachers. Additionally, while students and teachers are generally coping fairly well despite the circumstances, there is little engagement during online sessions and students are exhibiting poor retention of the knowledge gained in music learning spaces.

Key words: *Music education, Secondary Schools, Remote Learning, Blended Learning, Technology, Engagement, Assessment, Mental Health, Antigua and Barbuda, COVID-19 Pandemic*

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INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE

The Caribbean region has long been prized as a melting pot of cultures, with each island or mainland territory contributing its own unique expressions of the visual and performing arts. Arguably, at the forefront of these artforms is music. Genres such as Kaiso, Reggae, Benna Soca and Bouyon are distinctive sounds which provide the Caribbean with a form of musical identity apart from the rest of the western world. As such, preservation through education is critical. Additionally, quite a number of studies have shown that an education in music can potentially heighten students' performance in other subject areas such as mathematics and language, two areas where many Caribbean students have encountered difficulty. On the other hand, music education provides a multitude of its own unique benefits to students, to include relief from stress, increased cognitive and motor function, as well as providing an outlet for creativity and self-expression.

Before the late 1990s, Music was not offered as a formal subject with a prescribed curriculum in most of Antigua and Barbuda's Secondary Schools (Byron). In some cases, particularly at the Antigua Girls' High School, students were taught basic music theory and also had the opportunity to be a member of the school choir. At this time, there were no school steel orchestras, as the steelpan was still regarded as taboo within society. As such, most students' musical experiences were at the primary level, either in the Government-funded primary school system where music was incorporated into the teaching and learning of other subject areas, or they may have had music lessons taught by a specialist music teacher if they attended a private

primary school. Some may have also learned an instrument as an extra-curricular activity. This model would have continued at the secondary level for both Government and private schools.

However, by the year 2000 the first cohort of Antiguan music students sat what is now referred to as the CSEC Music Examination. Unfortunately, while being offered for over two decades, no formal studies have been published that assess the effectiveness of music education in Antigua and Barbuda. As a passionate music educator herself, the researcher felt a responsibility to carry out a study that would form the basis of scholarly information available on the topic.

Additionally, the rapid onslaught of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in December of 2019, and the resultant health and safety measures implemented to prevent its spread had very evidently shaken education systems internationally. By decree of the Government and the Ministry of Education, all educational institutions in Antigua and Barbuda were forced to convert to remote learning, which was a new and unfamiliar experience for many students and teachers. This was particularly evident in the area of secondary school music education, which is heavily comprised of practical and interactive elements. As such, the researcher intended to investigate educational problems arising from this shift, through a comprehensive pandemic perspective.

By analysing the methods and materials used by educators in these schools, the researcher hoped to identify and assess the merits and drawbacks of virtual music learning during a pandemic, and by doing so identify best practices which may be adopted island-wide. Additionally, the study was intended to identify areas which may require attention from administration at the school level, as well as the administration within the Ministry of Education.

THESIS STATEMENT

As it pertains to Antigua and Barbuda, it can be said that the facilitation of effective music education programmes in secondary schools has been widely impacted as a result of several educational problems arising from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

PARAMETERS

This research was conducted over a period of one year, from May 2021 to May 2022. The primary focus was the twin-island state of Antigua and Barbuda and the music education offerings of its secondary schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The study sought to identify the educational implications of remote music learning and teaching on stakeholders within the chosen demographic. In total, eight schools were studied: 6 Government/Public Schools - Antigua Girls' High School (AGHS), Antigua Grammar School (AGS), Clare Hall Secondary School (CHSS), Ottos Comprehensive School (OCS), Pares Secondary School (PSS) and Princess Margaret Secondary School (PMS); 2 Private Schools - Christ the King High School (CKHS) and St. Anthony's Secondary School (SASS). In most cases, both students and teachers from Forms 1 - 5 at each of the schools participated.

A total of 64 students participated in the student survey from 7 different schools. Of them, 66% were female, while 34% of the students were male. Their ages were spread across four categories, with 3% between the ages of 11 and 12 years, 28% between the ages of 13 and 14 years, the majority (47%) between the ages of 15 and 16, and 22% between the ages of 17 and 18. A total of 7 teachers participated in the teacher survey from 6 schools. Of them, 43% were female and 57% were male. Their ages spanned only two categories, with the majority (86%) between the ages of 25 and 39, and the remainder (14%) between the ages of 40 and 50.

In order to gain further insight on matters surrounding music teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were carried out with six (6) secondary school music educators with varying levels of teaching experience before the shift to remote learning. These were Ms. Abi McCoy, Mr. Kareem King, Mr. Joel George, Ms. Nerisa Joseph, Mrs. Caryl Edwards-Lewis and Mr. Patrick Thomas, who teach at the Clare Hall Secondary School, the Princess Margaret Secondary School, the Pares Secondary School, the Antigua Grammar School, the Antigua Girls' High School and the St. Anthony's Secondary School respectively. On the first tier of teaching experience are Ms. McCoy with approximately three (3) years and Mr. King with approximately four and a half (4 ½) years. On the second level are Mr. George who has amassed nine (9) years of experience and Ms. Joseph who has amassed fifteen (15) years teaching experience. Finally, Mrs. Edwards-Lewis and Mr. Thomas have the most teaching experience with approximately nineteen (19) and twenty (20) years respectively.

The Curriculum Officer with responsibility for Music within the Ministry of Education also participated in the study.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were to explore the various methodologies used by music educators in facilitating programmes in Secondary Schools during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and to ascertain their effectiveness in teaching music to Secondary-level students during these unforeseen and unprecedented circumstances. Additionally, it was intended to assess students' and teachers' ability to cope with the challenges presented by the pandemic. Finally, the researcher hoped to identify best practices which might be insightful for music educators island-wide, as well as highlight areas of concern to stakeholders within school administration and the Ministry of Education.

METHODOLOGY

This study is an example of mixed methods research whereby both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. As such, both primary and secondary sources were utilised during the course of the research. The secondary sources included articles, books and previously conducted research studies that were applicable to the topic chosen, in order to gain insight from the writing of others. The primary sources included data obtained from surveys as well as responses obtained through interviews (See Appendices A, B, C and D). These were completed by students, teachers and the Curriculum Officer with responsibility for Music within the Ministry of Education in Antigua and Barbuda. Because of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the surveys and interview questions were compiled using “Google Forms” and distributed via email and social media applications such as “WhatsApp” and “Facebook.”

The student survey consisted of three (3) open-ended questions and thirteen (13) closed-ended questions which served to obtain a better understanding of students’ experiences learning music during the COVID-19 pandemic, support they received, how they have been coping and their preference with regard to the forms of learning taking place. A total of sixty-four (64) students from both public and private schools participated in the survey. The teacher survey consisted of four (4) open-ended questions and sixteen (16) closed-ended questions. These questions focused on the same topics as the student survey, in addition to the musical and educational tools being utilised by the teachers and their perception of students’ engagement and retention of knowledge. A total of seven (7) public and private school teachers participated in the survey.

Furthermore, six teachers with varying levels of teaching experience were asked to complete a “take-home” interview which explored similar topics to the teacher survey, but was

more specific and thorough with respect to the line of questioning. The variety in years of experience was carefully chosen in order to identify any differences in perspective. The researcher was also careful to ensure that each level was represented by both male and female educators. Some of the areas covered included preparedness to teach remotely, CSEC Music preparations and coping mechanisms for themselves and their students.

The researcher also found it pertinent to approach the Curriculum Officer within the Ministry of Education with responsibility for music education, in order to obtain general information on music education in Antigua and Barbuda during the COVID-19 pandemic. Resultantly, Mrs. Marion Byron, Education Officer: Curriculum – Music and Theatre Arts agreed to a “take-home” interview where she discussed her experiences in the position during this period, support provided for Music teachers by the Ministry of Education, local CSEC Music Examination results and her outlook for secondary school music education in the future.

Finally, one other primary source for consideration is the researcher’ observations and reflection of her own experiences as a Tertiary-level music student, a Secondary School Music teacher and a private piano and violin teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic. It must be noted that it was these experiences which prompted the undertaking of this study.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Each of the three chapters of this study is titled in correspondence with a particular educational problem: “Technology in Music Education,” “Engagement and Assessment,” “Mental Health of Students and Teachers.”

Chapter 1 addresses issues faced by both students and teachers due to the mandatory shift to virtual education. By definition, virtual education demands the understanding and use of

technology to facilitate learning. This segment will explore matters including but not limited to infrastructure, educators' preparedness to teach music remotely and the use of music software, social media and other applications.

Chapter 2 of this research investigates the matter of student engagement and assessment in virtual music learning spaces during the pandemic. It calls to attention the effectiveness of teaching strategies employed within said spaces and invites discourse about best practices for virtual music education, particularly as it pertains to secondary music education in Antigua and Barbuda.

Health and wellness are frequent topics of conversation in society today and as such, the final chapter takes a look at the health and wellness of stakeholders in the education system. Due to the nature of the Covid-19 Pandemic and its obvious implications on physical health, the author chose to highlight the psychological impacts of the pandemic, particularly as it pertains to the mental health of music students and teachers, as well as the use of music as a therapeutic agent during the pandemic period.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of virtual education is by no means uncommon within today's global society, as many universities offer online programmes for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies (Habibollah, Kamalian, & Tabrizi; Munene; Castano-Munoz, Carnoy, & Duarte). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted students and teachers across all levels from early childhood to tertiary education due to the emergent shift to virtual learning (Zuo, Ma and Luo; Song, Wu and Zhi; Marshall, Shannon and Love).

The forms of virtual learning synonymous with the COVID-19 pandemic include remote teacher online which can be synchronous or asynchronous, and blended learning, which is a combination of face-to-face instruction by a teacher, with computer-based, internet-based or remote teacher online learning. One study by scholars Song, Wu and Zhi from China, takes a critical look at the “status quo of online teaching and teachers’ needs amidst the COVID-19 response efforts”. This study found that online teaching was adopted by most schools offering interactive, live-streamed sessions while only a few offered one-on-one tutoring of students. Additionally, almost all teachers had benefitted from previous training in online education, but only 6% found the training completely effective in satisfying the current teaching requirements (Song, Wu and Zhi). Another study showed that online instruction was more lecture-based and did not allow for much self-directed or social-collaborative learning. And while most of the students attended live lectures, few studied on their own afterwards. Additionally, most did not participate in social-collaborative learning (Zuo, Ma and Luo).

In the case of music learning, some studies had been carried out pre-pandemic in order to document the efficacy of music learning in a virtual space, particularly as music is typically considered a social and practical subject. One study by McCarthy et al in Dublin, Ireland, looked at the use of a music software programme called “Networked DrumSteps” which allows users to collaborate remotely to compose pieces of music, without using standard notation. The study found that most of the participants benefitted from being able to collaborate and interact with one of their peers, which resulted in (in their opinion) better compositions than if they had worked single-handedly. Additionally, students also indicated that it was much more “fun” than working by themselves (McCarthy).

Within the past year, quite a few studies have emerged that detail music education offerings of educational institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic from across the globe (Hash; Levstek, Barnaby and Pockock; Thorgerson and Mars; Miulescu and Matei; Yildiz, Karsal and Bagci; Akarsu). These studies highlight major topics in the realm of virtual music education to include (but not limited to) instrument instruction, ensemble work and composition, the use of technology to facilitate music learning and the experiences of music students and teachers during the pandemic.

Generally, researchers found that internet connection and latency issues made music classes challenging, particularly where practical work is concerned. In fact, the undergraduate instrument instructors who participated in the Turkish study of Yildiz et al stated that they would not recommend teaching and learning an instrument virtually due to the inconsistencies of the available medium (Yildiz, Karsal and Bagci). Similarly, in a study of school bands in Illinois, USA Hash indicated that the internet and latency issues allowed for solo instruction, but resulted in very little ensemble work (Hash).

Contrastingly, a study from the United Kingdom reported wide success with group music-making despite some technological challenges. Its results showed virtual ensemble exercises to be “a meaningful psychological resource” for participants and also reported that students were able to use music as a tool for self-expression and emotion management, restored lost musical identities and confidence, and preserved treasured social connections (Levstek, Barnaby and Pockock). This was not the case with most other studies, whose authors report a general lack of motivation and engagement within students (Hash; Thorgerson and Mars; Miulescu and Matei; Yildiz, Karsal and Bagci; Akarsu). It must be noted that in his study, Hash reported that due to the inability to conduct practical sessions, the focus of music classes became

theory-intense, however it is unclear whether this is responsible for the lack of engagement, retention and low motivation within students and will require further research.

With regard to music teachers, a Swedish study explored the Facebook Group “Musiklärarna” (“The Music Teachers”) and its use throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Thorgerson and Mars). It found that before the pandemic teachers typically created their own content and learning resources for their students. However, many educators found themselves “lost” on how to adequately engage their students in these new and unusual conditions, while staying true to the syllabus. The results showed that through the sharing of ideas and best practices, teachers were better able to motivate and engage their students in class. Additionally, the group was viewed as a safe space for venting and sharing any challenges faced. This collegial support saw a renewed sense of motivation within themselves despite the circumstances (Thorgerson and Mars). A similar effect of collaboration on mental health within students is seen in Levstek’s study, however further research is required to establish connection, if any.

In Antigua and Barbuda and the wider Caribbean, there have been no studies carried out to assess the effectiveness of the music education offerings in secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, this research is intended to form the basis of scholarly work in the field locally and regionally and to identify topics requiring further research.

CHAPTER ONE – TECHNOLOGY IN MUSIC EDUCATION

In March of 2020, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and its Ministry of Education took the decision to close all schools in response to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly afterward, school administrations were instructed to resume teaching and learning remotely. By definition, remote virtual education requires the use of technology in the form of computers and other devices, the internet, software programmes, social media and other applications. It must be noted however that by January of 2021, there were periods of face-to-face and blended (combination of remote virtual and face-to-face) learning for some, as the Government and Ministry of Education adjusted their regulations based on the number of active COVID-19 cases. On the other hand, due to the introduction of new variants, spikes in infection within communities and outbreaks in some schools, this policy was rescinded for the start of the academic year 2021 – 2022 in September, after which instruction was delivered only via remote virtual means until the start of Term 2. During her interview Ms. A. McCoy indicated the following when asked what forms of learning were taking place:

“Blended learning mostly. Very sporadically though, as times are uncertain and we've had numerous lockdowns.”

This may have contributed to significant anxiety and stress amongst students and teachers (see Chapter 3).

Figure 1 shows the forms of learning which took place during the research period based on data obtained from the student survey. It can be seen that 70% of respondents were engaged in blended learning, whereby forms 1 and 3 attended school for face-to-face instruction together, while Forms 2 and 4 were at home receiving instruction virtually. The next day, Forms 2 and 4

would attend school in person while Forms 1 and 3 were online. Students in Form 5 preparing for the CSEC examinations and Level 3 classes (students with special needs) from Forms 1 - 4 attended school for face-to-face instruction every day. This accounts for the 28% of respondents who indicated that they were being engaged in face-to-face learning. Contrarily, 2% of respondents indicated that they were being engaged in remote virtual learning only. This could be attributed to some parents making the decision to keep their children at home during the blended learning period.

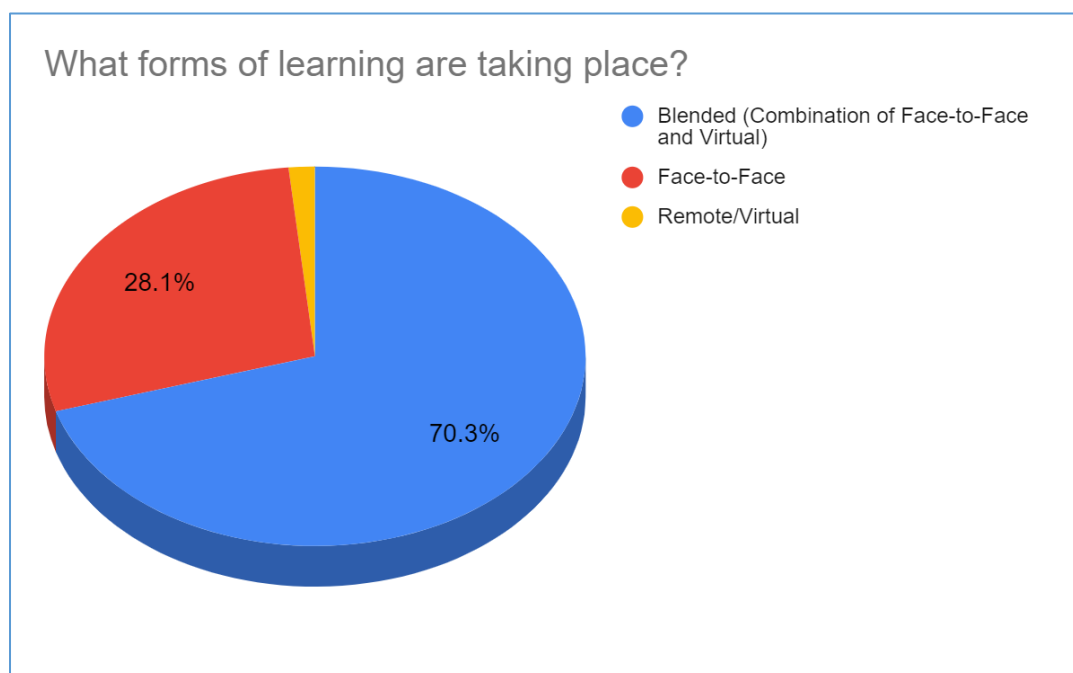


Figure 1 Pie chart showing the three forms of learning that took place

With regard to access provided through the Ministry of Education, the student survey saw that 28% of music students received devices (laptops, tablets, printers, etc.) and 23% received internet access. On the other hand, 55% of students indicated they had not received any assistance in gaining access to the basic materials required in order to engage in virtual learning from the Ministry of Education. This could be due to a lack of resources on the Ministry's part or

because some students already had access to devices and the internet facilitated by their parents. Further research is required to ascertain the percentage of students who did not have access to any of these basic necessities for virtual learning, and as such would not have been engaged on the days they were required to be at home. This would highlight a major gap in the education system as these students would only be engaged for half of the time intended (face-to-face only) and may not have been able to complete online activities and assessments, placing them at a distinct disadvantage when compared to those with access. It must be noted however that Ms. N. Joseph indicated in her interview that in order to mitigate this problem, her school (Antigua Grammar School) requested that subject teachers compile special packages of resources for students without access to the necessities for virtual learning. The number of students who actually benefitted from these packages, their effectiveness in facilitating learning and whether other schools incorporated this practice is also an area requiring further research.

Based on the results of the teacher survey, the majority (57%) of music teachers received support from the Ministry of Education during the pandemic. Of this group, 75% indicated access to devices and 50% indicated access to the internet. When asked what resources they would have liked to have provided to them, most teachers indicated a need for devices and internet subsidies (or faster response to the need for devices and internet access), subscriptions to online platforms to assist in teaching as well as technical support.

Further research is required in order to ascertain whether there were instances where teachers were unable to reach students at all due to a lack of resources, and if provisions were made to facilitate students' learning in the absence of their teachers.

While the shift to remote virtual learning was relatively inevitable due to the nature of the circumstances, it must be noted that similarly to the teachers in the study of Thorgerson and

Mars, many Antiguan teachers indicated that they were not prepared to teach virtually (see Chapter 3). Regardless of this, 100% of teachers responded positively to the use of several technological media which they have incorporated into the delivery of content via music-specific technology as well as other technological teaching aids. Figure 2 shows the forms of music-specific technology utilized by music teachers during the remote virtual and blended learning periods. It can be seen that the most popular was the website “Musictheory.net” with 85% of teachers indicating they utilized it in their lessons. Another website called “Musictechteacher.com” was used by 43% of teachers. Several music notation software programmes were used by a significant number (57%) of teachers, to include Finale, Maestro, Musescore, and Sibelius. The same was recognized for music applications found in the Google Play Store.

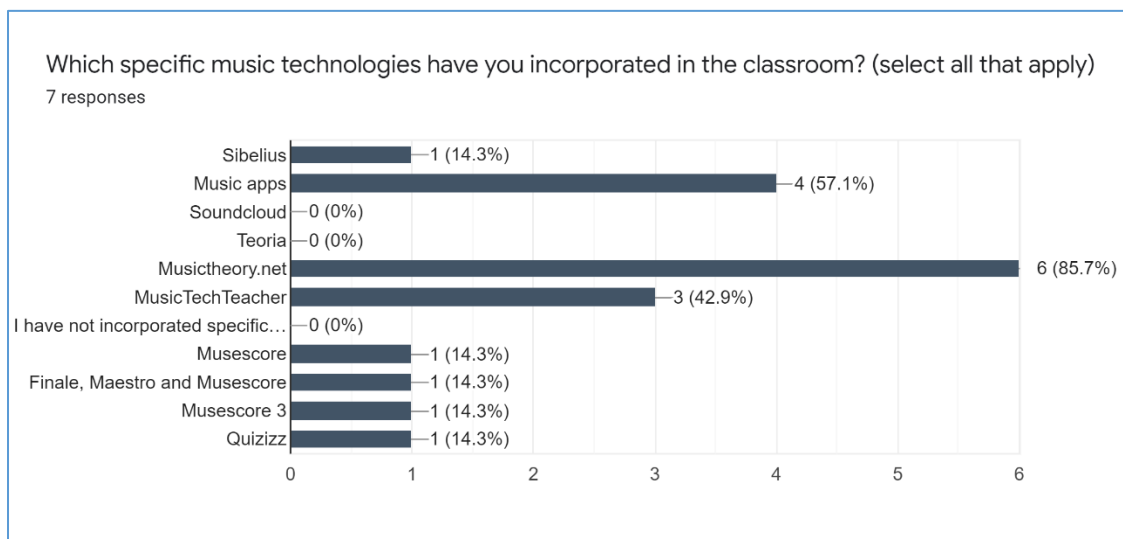


Figure 2 Bar graph showing specific music technologies that were being incorporated

Figure 3 shows the other technological teach aids which music teachers used in their remote virtual teaching. It can be seen that only 27% of the teachers used “Quizizz”, an online

engagement platform where teachers can assign live quizzes, polls tests. The video communication programme Zoom and Social Media apps such as Facebook and WhatsApp were of similar popularity in that they were each used by 43% of teachers. In his interview, Mr. P. Thomas of the private school St. Anthony's Secondary indicated the following:

“Prior to us taking on the challenge of blended teaching, the teachers at our school were trained. We were using a platform called Information Now, which was basically designed for the eventualities presented with this pandemic.”

This was not the case within the public secondary schools as teachers were only trained in the Google Classroom platform in response to the closure of schools in March 2020 (see Chapter 3).

Finally, both the Google Classroom platform and YouTube were the most popular as they were used by 100% of teachers. One reason for this is that the Google Classroom platform was enforced as the standard for all schools in Antigua and Barbuda by the Ministry of Education (Byron).

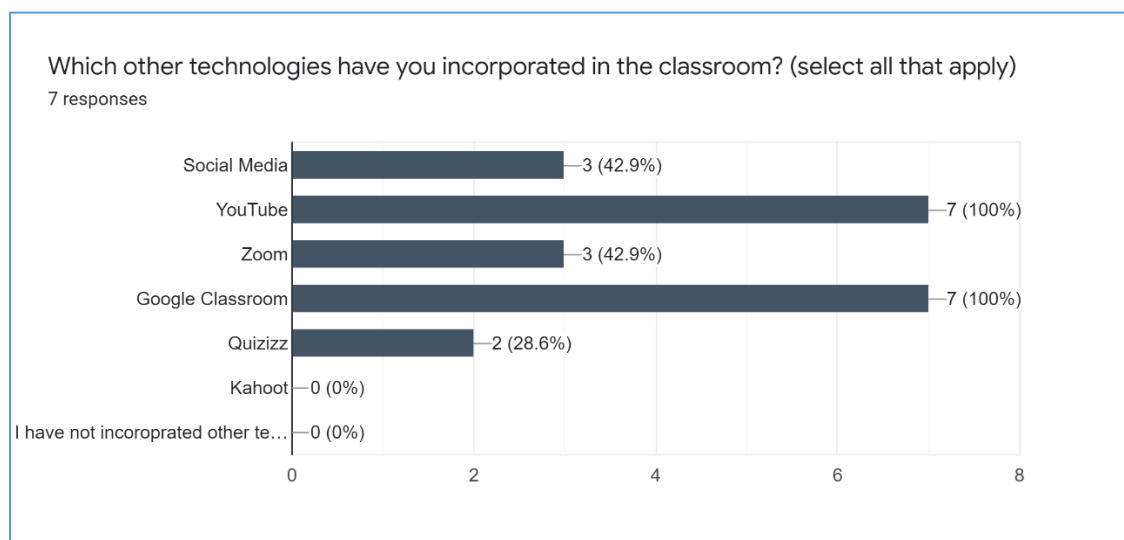


Figure 3 Bar graph showing other technologies that were being incorporated

Apart from Google Classroom, it must be noted that the technologies listed above were not being used as a standard throughout the schools and it is unclear whether they were prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Some teachers may have opted to use the resources they discovered and might have purchased themselves. Further research is required in order to evaluate their effectiveness as part of the music education offerings of Antigua and Barbuda.

The last point of discussion on the topic of technology is the matter of technical difficulties when utilizing devices and the internet. It must be noted that only one of the teacher interviewees made any indication of this when asked to list some challenges faced during the remote virtual and blended learning period. Mrs. C. Edwards-Lewis responded:

“Internet signal dropping, device audio issues, too much screen time, Google usage.”

When asked how her school has responded to these challenges, she indicated that the administration has offered “words of encouragement and Google training.” When asked how the Ministry of Education has responded to these challenges, she said that it has “[carried out] surveys and provided Google training.” These responses do not directly address the issue of technical difficulties, however the effectiveness of the strategies implemented is an area requiring further research. Additionally, it is unclear whether the other teachers did not experience any technical difficulties at all, if said difficulties (as exhibited in previous international studies) were to be understood as a typical hazard of the mediums required for online teaching and learning, or if they were insignificant as it pertains to their online music classes.

CHAPTER TWO – ENGAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT

Two measures that are integral to the study of any educational programme is student engagement in the classroom, as well as their retention and application of the information learned during said classes upon assessment. In the teacher survey (see Appendix B), respondents were asked to rate their students' levels of engagement in their virtual music classes on a scale from one (1) – “poor” to ten (10) – “excellent” (see Figure 4). It can be seen that the results are generally split. On the lower end, 43% selected between 3 and 4. On the other hand, 43% of teachers selected between 6 and 7. The highest rating was eight (8) which was selected by only 14% of teachers.

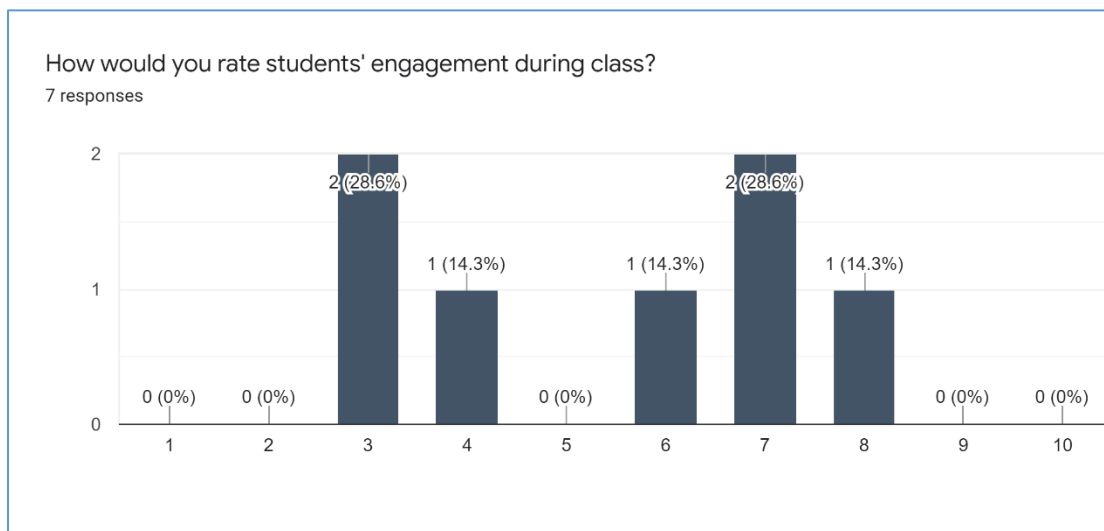


Figure 4 Bar graph showing ratings of student engagement by teachers

From this, it can be inferred that the average rating of students' engagement by teachers was five point four (5.4), which does not particularly lean toward either end of the spectrum, as in some of the studies mention in the review of literature. Additionally, due to the lack of research on this topic in Antigua and Barbuda before the pandemic, it is not possible to make

comparisons. When asked to share any comments they had on students' engagement, four teachers shared:

“Level 3 students tend to be a lot more difficult to settle and to communicate information.”

“Lack of devices make online learning extremely lacklustre.”

“Slow reactions and little participation.”

“Engagement is poor all around. Students seem to forget they have school when they are at home.”

This is similar to the findings of Zuo et al and Song et al. According to these responses from teachers, it might be inferred that the main reasons for the average rate of student engagement in online classes are a level of comfort or the absence of “school-mode” as they are at home, possible internet delays and lack of devices. Additionally, students with learning disabilities and special needs (Level 3) might find learning in a virtual space particularly challenging, which might be viewed as a lack of engagement.

When asked to share their personal level of attentiveness in music class, it must be noted that the majority of students (64%) believed they always paid attention, while the remainder (36%) admitted to paying attention only sometimes (See Figure 5).

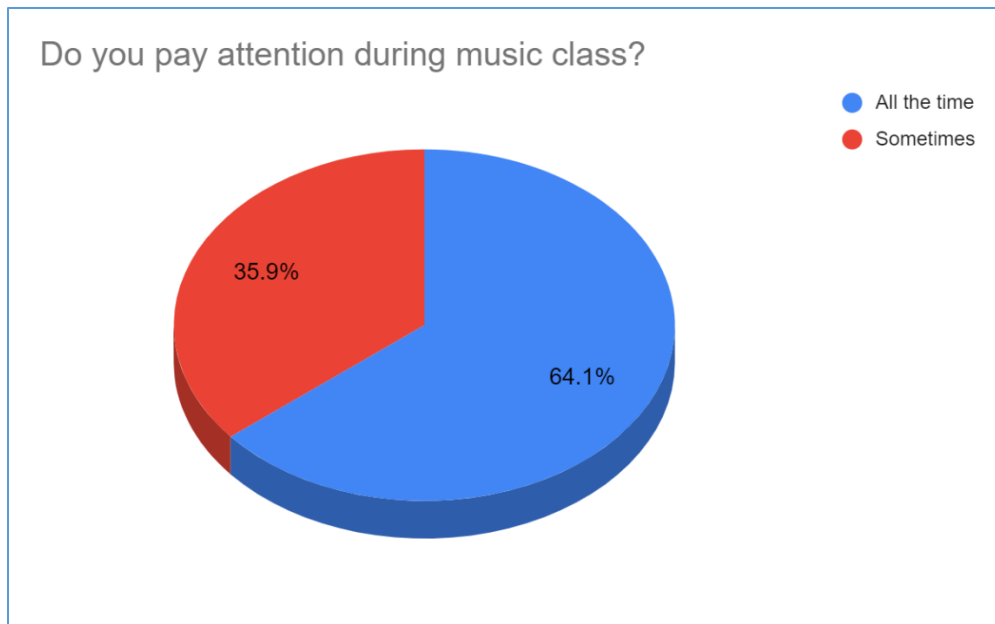


Figure 5 Pie chart showing student attentiveness in class

Comparatively, the views of the teachers and students do not quite align. One reason for this could be that while students report being engaged, they may be reluctant to ask or answer questions in class, possibly for the same reasons they may not do so in face-to-face lessons. Some of these could include shyness, social anxiety or fear of judgement from their teacher or peers. However, teachers might view this as a lack of engagement, especially if cameras are not turned on during online sessions. This would prohibit them from truly gauging students' attentiveness to the lesson for themselves. Additionally, some students may not have functioning video or audio systems on their devices and may not utilise the chat option. Further research is required to establish definitive answers to these questions.

Performance is typically a key component of any music education curriculum. As such, another aspect of engagement which must be considered is the facilitation of practical sessions with students during the blended learning period. It must be noted that for the most part, Antiguan and Barbudan students were not engaging in practical sessions online. Some practical

sessions resumed when the Form 5 students returned to face-to-face instruction every day.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said of the other levels as they attended school in person on alternating days. As such, due to time-table issues, some students would have their music classes at school, while others were online. Because of this, students were able to engage in practical sessions only if and when their music classes coincided with the days they were at school in-person. When asked what provisions they would have liked to benefit from during the remote and blended learning periods, many students and teachers indicated a need of more face-to-face practical sessions as well as instruments for students to utilise at home. Further research is required to determine whether systems were implemented to mitigate this problem and the effectiveness of the solutions, if any.

In her interview, Mrs. M. Byron who is the Education Officer, Curriculum Music and Theatre Arts said:

“In one or two schools, the remote learning actually was positive for students who took the time to engage in more personal practice...However in some schools, where there may have already been weak interest and engagement of students in regular classroom, several students have become frustrated and have not produced any work or had the means to practice.”

This is concerning because it highlights inconsistencies in the music education offerings of different schools during the remote and blended learning periods. Further research is required at the school level in order to evaluate what deviations are present and their resultant effects on the music education offerings of each school. Additionally, performance is not the only area of inconsistency. When asked to list some of the challenges she faced in her position since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mrs. Byron also cited “the uneven coverage of work

across schools” as a cause for concern. This could be due to a multitude of factors which have been discussed previously.

In the student survey, respondents were asked to give a qualitative measure of the amount of knowledge they felt they had gained in their music classes during the remote and blended learning periods. It can be seen that 36% of students believed they had learned “lots of things,” 50% learned “some things” and 14% reported “not much” knowledge gained (See Figure 6).

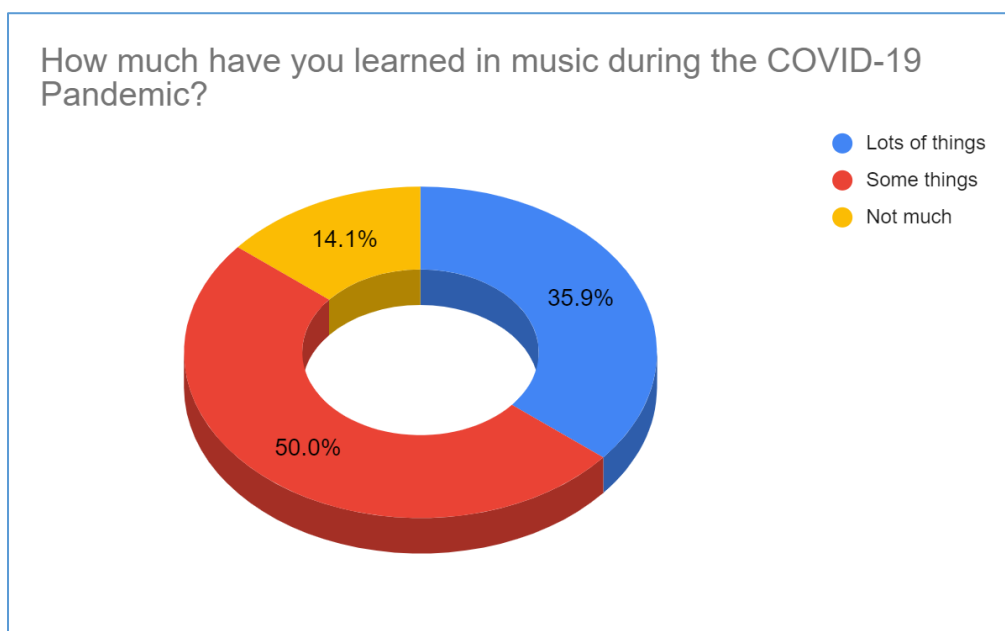


Figure 6 Doughnut chart showing how much students believed they had learned during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Teachers were also asked to rate their students’ retention of knowledge on a scale from one (1) – “poor” to ten (10) – “excellent” (see Figure 7). It is clear that the results were on the lower end of the spectrum, as 86% of teachers gave their students a rating between one (1) and five (5). The most popular ratings were three (3) and five (5), with 29% each. The highest rating was eight (8) which was selected by 14% of teachers.

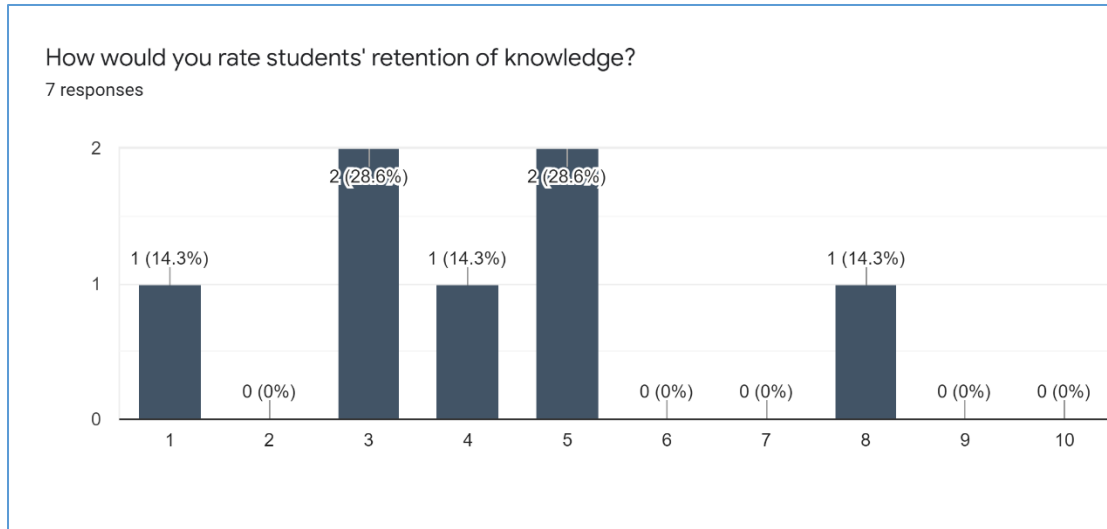


Figure 7 Bar graph showing teachers' ratings of students' retention of knowledge

It can be seen that the average rating was 3.7, which is relatively low. While it might be challenging to compare the two results as one is qualitative and the other is quantitative, it can be inferred that students' retention of the lessons taught is generally low. This is concerning because one of the major goals of education is that students retain and use the information they have learned. When asked to add any comments on students' retention of knowledge, two teachers shared:

“Students tend to remember about music only when it's time for class. Little or no revision takes place so they do not retain well.”

“They don't retain much from online learning. They normally just do enough to submit an assignment. Never to retain information.”

“Students who participated online completed assessments accordingly. But that was few and far between.”

Based on their responses, it can be inferred that one reason for the low retention levels is a general lack of motivation within students. In her interview, Mrs. Byron alluded to the same,

within both student and teaching bodies. This lack of motivation could be attributed to several factors, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Another explanation for the low rates of retention in students could be the forms of assessments utilised. When asked to share the assessment methods they carried out, some teachers indicated:

“I’ve used video presentations and questionnaires to assess my students...For practical evaluations, I’ve asked the students to video record themselves performing on their instruments.” – P. Thomas

“I have used face to face practical assessments, as well as online platform assessments such as Quizizz and Google Classroom assignments.” – K. King

“Online quizzes through Google forms. Assignments to be handed in online.” – A. McCoy

“Formative assessments to include: online quizzes, practicals, homework tasks, submitting a post based on a piece of music. Summative assessment - open book quiz.” – N. Joseph

It can be seen that most assessments were given through virtual means, which would require a certain level of technological competence from students in order for them to complete. If a student is not particularly technologically literate, this could hamper their ability to properly navigate and complete the assessments, resulting in a poor result. Indeed, the same can be said for participation in online classes as well.

Finally, one aspect of assessment which must be considered is the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Examinations in Music. This examination, facilitated by the

Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) is the final assessment for secondary school music students, typically at the Form 5 level. In their interviews, teachers were asked to share how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted preparations for this exam. Some of the responses are listed below:

“For some students, the current situation has affected the preparations since the only time they practice their instrument is during our one-on-one sessions.”

“It has affected the process horribly. Although students are being pushed to complete SBAs and content etc, it has become an extreme strain to cover all the topics that would've been missed during the remote period. Practice time on instruments have tremendously decreased.”

“Lock down had put a delay or halt on the normal interactive sessions especially performance where majority of students would practice at school. Students lost a lot of quality time not having access to instruments.”

“Time away from my students during the lockdown really placed those without an instrument at home at a disadvantage. Lack of practice time and such definitely will affect their overall grade.”

“[Lack of] time to cover content.”

The two major themes occurring throughout the responses is a lack of resources to facilitate practical sessions regularly, particularly for students without access to an instrument at home, and not enough time to cover content. Both are concerning due to the heavy practical and theoretical aspects of the CSEC Music Exam. If students are unable to practice regularly or cover the prescribed content, it could reflect negatively in their results.

On the other hand, in her interview Mrs. Byron made the following statement:

“The CSEC Music results in 2020 compared very well to previous years and in some circumstances showed improvement. This year the Moderation of SBAs suggest that students in many schools are performing favourably. However, there seems to be a potential higher number of students dropping out of the exam.”

This indicates that while there may be some deficiencies, students seem to be doing well. This could be as a result of teachers’ efforts and CXC adopting more lenient marking practices due to the circumstances. Unfortunately, the higher number of students dropping out of the examination is a cause for concern. While it can be assumed that this is at least in part due to a lack of practice time and an inability to cover content effectively, further research is required in order to derive definitive answers to the question.

CHAPTER THREE – MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

The challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic have given rise to more conversations about mental health internationally. Apart from anxiety and fear brought about by the nature and risk of severe illness and death that comes with this disease, social distancing and government-imposed lockdowns have impacted the mental health of most of the world's population. Due to the rapid shift to remote virtual and blended learning, it is important to study the effects on the mental health of music students and teachers in Antigua and Barbuda.

Students were asked to give a qualitative measure of how they were coping during the COVID-19 pandemic (See Figure 8). It can be seen that only 6% of students said they were coping “very well”, 33% said “fairly well”, 41% answered “getting by” and 20% answered “not well at all”. More than half the students reported they were not coping in a desirable way. This is concerning because students' mental health can impact their ability to function at optimal levels and thus, impact their performance in school. Unfortunately, due to the vast number of challenges presented by the “new normal” and the differences in circumstances of students, it is difficult to say what the main reasons for these negative impacts on mental health.

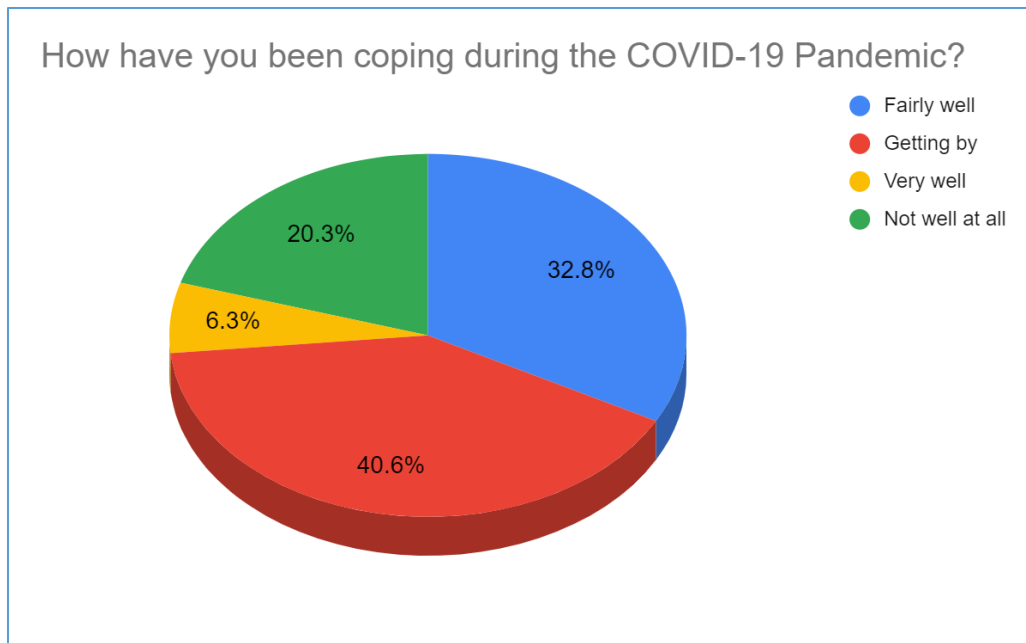


Figure 8 Pie chart showing how well students believed they had been coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Teachers were asked what coping mechanisms they incorporated to assist their students. There responses were:

“I have encouraged some students to compose music based on their feelings and their experiences. Some have decided to practice their instruments more thus, they have become better. There are students who have reached out to me just to talk about their feelings on Covid - 19 and the ways it has changed their lives.”

“I have given my number to them to reach out if they need anything as well as create various WhatsApp groups for specific students.”

“To have motivational talks from time to time, and encourage them to do corrections to assignments and gain additional points.”

“I have tried to make in class assignments fun. Incorporated games into sessions. Occasional check-ins.”

“Encourage them to take breaks, get out of the house, go to the beach, exercise, watch movies, play video games.”

While it is evident that these are all good strategies to promote good mental health, further research is required to assess the effects of each on music students. In considering Levstek’s study, one method to improve students’ mental health could be to find creative ways to engage in practical and ensemble work (in-person or virtual).

On the other hand, when students were asked if music classes have helped them to cope during the pandemic, the majority (58%) answered “no”. Many of the reasons for this might be attributed to external factors such as fear of infection, social distancing, cabin fever and home and family life.

However, with regard to music classes, a lack of engagement and motivation has been previously reported (see Chapter 2). Some reasons for this might include frustration due to technical difficulties, classes where content is the focus in order to make up for lost time, lack of contact with classmates and opportunities to perform and any preexisting learning disability which makes online learning tedious for some.

On the other hand, when students were asked to rate their experiences in music classes during the remote and blended learning periods on a scale from one (1) – “boring” to ten (10) – “I love it!”, the results showed that most students’ experiences were favorable (see Figure 9). It can be seen that 74% gave their music classes a rating of six (6) or above.

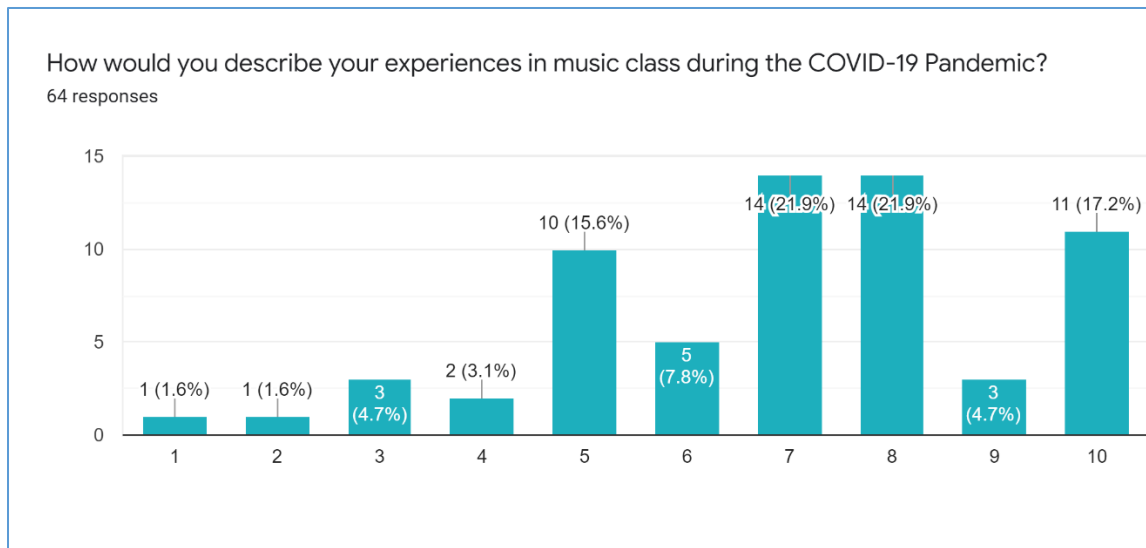


Figure 9 Bar graph showing students' ratings of their music classes during the COVID-19 Pandemic

This might therefore mean that while students have had good experiences in class, it has not done much in the way of relieving some of the tensions and fears associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. One avenue for further research might be to investigate the effects of targeted music therapy interventions for secondary school music students. It must be noted that when asked what measures they would have liked to see implemented by their schools and the Ministry of Education, several students and teachers indicated “counselling sessions”.

Teachers were also asked to share how they had been coping during the remote and blended learning periods (see Figure 10). It has been recorded that the majority (86%) was evenly divided between “getting by” and “fairly well”. The “not well at all” option was selected by 14% of teachers.

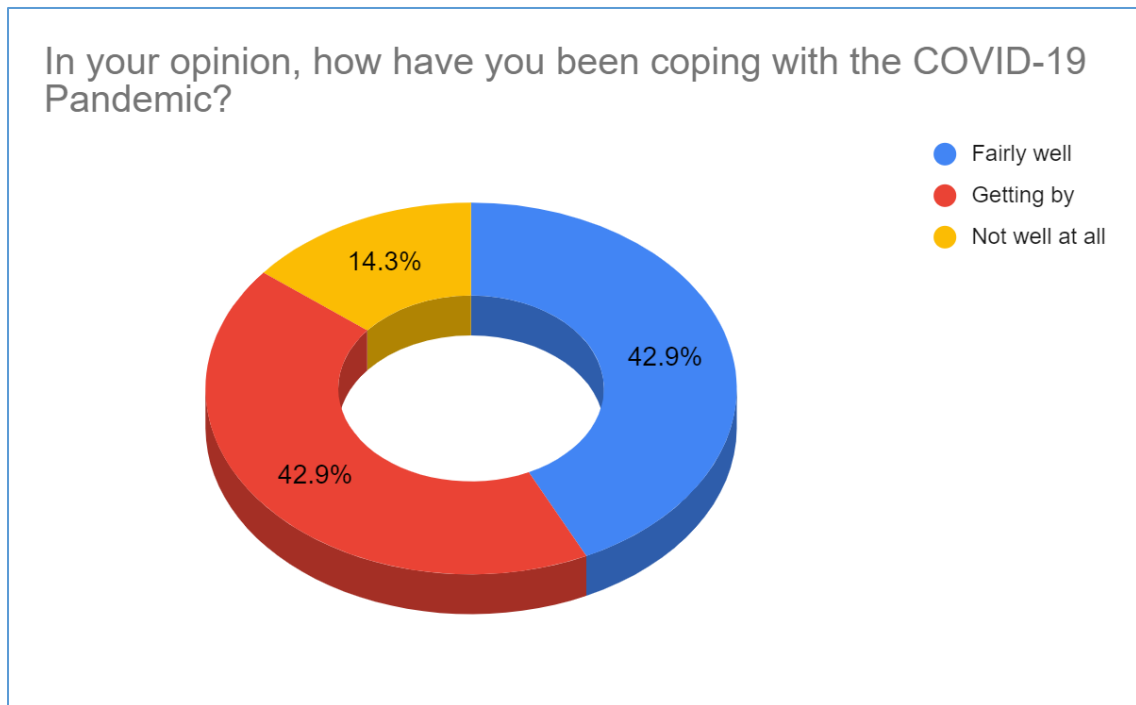


Figure 10 Doughnut chart showing how well teachers believed they had been coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic

One reason for this fairly well-adjustment is that all the interviewed teachers indicated relative preparedness to teach online. Here are some of their responses:

“It was not a challenge for me since I incorporated online learning with my students for the past four years.”

“Not 100% prepared”

“Fairly ok”

“So -so. I was aware of the technology that could be used, and online resources. But I was nowhere close to prepared as it regarded balancing peace of mind and teaching during this time.”

Therefore, it can be inferred that while teaching online was not particularly difficult for many music teachers, balancing teaching along with other external factors associated with the pandemic resulted in a diminished sense of wellness. It must also be noted that similarly to the findings of Thorgerson and Mars, teachers reported collegial support with respect to the sharing of online resources, material and ideas among most. However, it does not appear to have been a coping-mechanism. Mrs. Byron also provided support to music teachers by checking in with them regularly and offering words of encouragement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the year 2020, most of the education systems of the world were challenged to withstand and respond to the major threat of disease brought about by the coronavirus, in order to protect the health of stakeholders, particularly students and teachers. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has had both positive and negative effects on the music education offerings of secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda.

It is unclear whether the Government and Ministry of Education were in possession of the resources to ensure that all students and teachers had access to tools required to effectively participate in teaching and learning during the early stages of this period. The most pertinent of these resources included devices, internet access and access to musical instruments with which to practice. While the effort to carry out surveys in order to ascertain how many students and teachers required these resources is commendable, quite a few persons were left without them for an extended period. This resulted in large gaps in students' music learning, which is not ideal for any educational program.

This might have been avoided if the Ministry of Education provided resources for the students and teachers on a "needs basis", rather than waiting until resources became available for all. Additionally, while the researcher agrees that Form 5 students were a priority due to their pending CSEC Examinations, the lack of emphasis placed on the needs of lower school students may prove to be detrimental in the long run.

This study also revealed that while students and teachers reported that they were coping relatively well despite the circumstances of the pandemic, student engagement and retention of

knowledge are fairly low due to inconsistencies in the methods utilised by music teachers of different schools, as well as a lack of support and motivation within stakeholders. Fortunately, this can be remedied in several ways. Firstly, counselling services and talk therapy should be made available on a wider scale to students and teachers upon request. In addition to this, creating spaces for camaraderie and collaboration between colleagues (student and teachers) could potentially help those suffering from anxiety, depression, lack of motivation and other mental health issues. Another recommendation would be for the Curriculum Officer to increase efforts to train music teachers in the use of online music resources and applications. This would help to decrease the inconsistencies between the music programmes of different schools and create a standard of music education which all teachers could follow.

Finally, as a music teacher at the Clare Hall Secondary School, the researcher has seen for herself the evidence presented in by this study with her own students. These deficiencies were highlighted even more when all students returned to full face to face instruction in March of 2022. Because of this, the researcher also recommends the implementation of after-school and summer school programs whereby the gaps in students' learning might be reduced by giving more contact time with which to cover content, at a pace that might promote greater success.

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APPENDIX A – STUDENT SURVEY

Musica Novum: A Study of the Music Education Offerings of Secondary Schools in Antigua and Barbuda During the COVID-19 Pandemic. (Student Survey)

My name is Joelle Michael and I am a Final Year student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in the program BA Musical Arts (Special). As part of the course HUMN3099, I am required to complete a research study centered around the Caribbean. Having experienced the inevitable shift to online learning myself, I chose to explore the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the music education offerings of secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. As a music student in Antigua and Barbuda, your experience during this time is critical to the completion of my research. Your responses will remain anonymous. Thank you for participating!

What school do you attend? *

- ☐ Antigua Girls' High School
- ☐ Antigua Grammar School
- ☐ Christ the King High School
- ☐ Clare Hall Secondary School
- ☐ Ottos Comprehensive School
- ☐ Pares Secondary School
- ☐ Princess Margaret Secondary School

Sex: *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

Age: *

- ☐ 11 - 12
- ☐ 13 - 14
- ☐ 15-16
- ☐ 17-18

What form are you in? *

- ☐ Form 1
- ☐ Form 2
- ☐ Form 3
- ☐ Form 4
- ☐ Form 5

What forms of learning are taking place? *

- ☐ Face-to-Face
- ☐ Remote/Virtual
- ☐ Blended (Combination of Face-to-Face and Virtual)

Has the Ministry of Education provided any of the following for music students during the COVID-19 Pandemic? (select all that apply) *

- ☐ Technological Devices (laptops, tablets, printers, etc.)
- ☐ Internet Access
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Counselling
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Other: _____

Has your school provided any of the following for music students? (select all that apply) *

- ☐ Technological Devices (laptops, tablets, printers, etc.)
- ☐ Internet Access
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Counselling
- ☐ None of the Above
- ☐ Other: _____

Apart from the answers listed above, what forms of support would you have liked to benefit from that may not have been provided? *

Your answer _____

Do you pay attention during music class? *

- ☐ Not really
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ All the time

How much have you learned in music during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Not much
- ☐ Some things
- ☐ Lots of things

How would you describe your experiences in music class during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Boring ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ I love it!

How have you been coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Not well at all
- ☐ Getting by
- ☐ Fairly well
- ☐ Very well

Has music class helped you to cope during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered "yes" above, say how music class has helped you to cope during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Your answer

Which mode of learning do you prefer? *

- ☐ Face-to-Face
- ☐ Remote/Virtual
- ☐ Blended (Combination of Face-to-Face and Virtual)

Give reason for your answer above. *

Your answer

Submit

APPENDIX B – TEACHER SURVEY

Musica Novum: A Study of the Music Education Offerings of Secondary Schools in Antigua and Barbuda During the COVID-19 Pandemic. (Teacher Survey)

My name is Joelle Michael and I am a Final Year student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in the program BA Musical Arts (Special). As part of the course HUMN3099, I am required to complete a research study centered around the Caribbean. Having experienced the inevitable shift to online learning myself, I chose to explore the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the music education offerings of secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. As a music educator in Antigua and Barbuda, your experience during this time is critical to the completion of my research. Your responses will remain anonymous. Thank you for participating!

At which of these schools are you stationed? *

- ☐ All Saints Secondary
- ☐ Antigua Girls' High School
- ☐ Antigua Grammar School
- ☐ Christ the King High School
- ☐ Clare Hall Secondary School
- ☐ Ottos Comprehensive School
- ☐ Pares Secondary School
- ☐ Princess Margaret Secondary School
- ☐ St. Anthony's Secondary School

Sex: *

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

Age: *

- ☐ 18 - 24
- ☐ 25 - 39
- ☐ 40 - 50
- ☐ Older than 50

What level do you teach? (select all that apply) *

- ☐ Form 1
- ☐ Form 2
- ☐ Form 3
- ☐ Form 4
- ☐ Form 5

What forms of learning are offered? (select all that apply) *

- ☐ Face-to-Face
- ☐ Remote Synchronous
- ☐ Remote Asynchronous
- ☐ Blended
- ☐ Other: _____

Has the Ministry of Education provided support for music educators during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered "yes" above, which of these apply? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Training/Personal Development
- ☐ Technological devices (laptops, tablets, printers, etc.)
- ☐ Internet access
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Counselling
- ☐ Other: _____

Has your school provided support during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered "yes" above, which of these apply? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Training/Personal Development
- ☐ Technological devices (laptop, tablet, etc.)
- ☐ Internet access
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Counselling
- ☐ Other: _____

Apart from the answers listed above, what forms of support would you have liked to benefit from that may not have been provided? *

Your answer _____

Which specific music technologies have you incorporated in the classroom? (select all that apply) *

- ☐ Sibelius
- ☐ Music apps
- ☐ Soundcloud
- ☐ Teoria
- ☐ Musictheory.net
- ☐ MusicTechTeacher
- ☐ I have not incorporated specific music technologies in the classroom.
- ☐ Other: _____

Which other technologies have you incorporated in the classroom? (select all that apply) *

- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Zoom
- ☐ Google Classroom
- ☐ Quizizz
- ☐ Kahoot
- ☐ I have not incorporated other technologies in the classroom.
- ☐ Other: _____

How would you rate students' engagement during class? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



Poor

○○○○○○○○○○○○○

Excellent

Any comments on students' engagement:

Your answer

How would you rate students' retention of knowledge? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Poor ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Excellent

Any comments on students' retention:

Your answer

In your opinion, how have music students been coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Not well at all
- ☐ Getting by
- ☐ Fairly well
- ☐ Very well

In your opinion, how have you been coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

- ☐ Not well at all
- ☐ Getting by
- ☐ Fairly well
- ☐ Very well

Which mode of teaching do you prefer? *

- ☐ Face-to-Face
- ☐ Remote Synchronus
- ☐ Remote Asynchronus
- ☐ Blended

Give reasons for your answer above. *

Your answer

Submit

APPENDIX C – TEACHER INTERVIEW

Musica Novum: A Study of the Music Education Offerings of Secondary Schools in Antigua and Barbuda During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Teacher Interview*

My name is Joelle Michael and I am a Final Year student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in the program BA Musical Arts (Special). As part of the course HUMN3099, I am required to complete a research study focused on the Caribbean. As a secondary school music educator (study leave) and also having experienced the inevitable shift to online learning myself, I chose to explore the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the music education offerings of secondary schools in Antigua and Barbuda. As a music educator, your insight and experience during this time is critical to the completion of my research. Do note that your personal information will be kept strictly confidential, within the parameters of the study. Thank you for participating!



Name: *

Your answer

Sex: *

☐ Female

☐ Male

Age: *

☐ 18 - 24

☐ 25 - 39

☐ 40 - 50

☐ Older than 50

How long have you been teaching Music in Secondary Schools? *

Your answer

At what school are you currently stationed?

*

- ☐ All Saints Secondary School
- ☐ Antigua Girls' High School
- ☐ Antigua Grammar School
- ☐ Christ the King High School
- ☐ Clare Hall Secondary School
- ☐ Ottos Comprehensive Shool
- ☐ Pares Secondary School
- ☐ Princess Margaret Secondary School
- ☐ St. Anthony's Secondary School

What Forms do you teach? *

Your answer

Over the past year, what forms of teaching have taken place and on what scale? (Face-to-Face, Remote Synchronous, Remote Asynchronous, Blended) *

Your answer

In your opinion, how prepared were you to teach during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

Your answer

Highlight some of the challenges you have faced while teaching during the Pandemic.

*

Your answer

How has your school responded to these challenges? *

Your answer

How has the Ministry of Education responded to these challenges? *

Your answer

What methods of assessment have you employed in your teaching? Comment on the effectiveness of these methods. *

Your answer

If you prepare students for the CSEC Music Examination, how has the current situation affected these preparations? Comment on your experience as well as your perception of its effects on students.

Your answer

How have you been coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

Your answer

What coping mechanisms (if any) have you employed to help yourself? *

Your answer

In your opinion, how have your students been coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

Your answer

What coping mechanisms (if any) have you employed to help your students? *

Your answer

In your opinion, how have your students been coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic?

*

Your answer

What coping mechanisms (if any) have you employed to help your students? *

Your answer

In your opinion, how has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the standard of secondary school music education offerings in Antigua and Barbuda? *

Your answer

Have you collaborated with any other music educators in Antigua and Barbuda to highlight best practices and derive a new standard of delivering music education in a virtual/blended space? Elaborate on these efforts. *

Your answer

Speak on your outlook for Secondary Music Education in Antigua and Barbuda going forward, i.e. post COVID-19. *

Your answer

ANY OTHER THOUGHTS OR COMMENTS:

Your answer

Submit

APPENDIX D – CURRICULUM OFFICER INTERVIEW

*Note: Mrs. Marion Byron completed the curriculum officer interview before the focus of the study was scaled down from three Caribbean countries to Antigua and Barbuda.

Musica Novum: A Comparative Study of the Music Education Offerings of Caribbean Secondary Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Curriculum Officer Interview*

My name is Joelle Michael and I am a Final Year student at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in the program BA Musical Arts (Special). As part of the course HUMN3099, I am required to complete a research study centered around the Caribbean. As a secondary school music educator (study leave) and also having experienced the inevitable shift to online learning myself, I chose to explore the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the music education offerings of secondary schools in three Caribbean countries: Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. As a Music Curriculum Officer, your insight and experience during this time is critical to the completion of my research. Thank you for participating!

Name: *

Your answer

Country: *

Your answer

Title/Position: *

Your answer

How long have you taught music in
secondary schools? *

Your answer

How long have you held your position as Curriculum Officer responsible for Music? *

Your answer

What (if any) training has been provided for music teachers during the COVID-19 Pandemic? *

Your answer

What (if any) deviations from the standard curriculum have been made to accommodate for the circumstances imposed by the Pandemic? *

Your answer

What challenges have you faced in your position due to COVID-19? *

Your answer

How has the Ministry of Education Responded to those challenges? *

Your answer

How have the circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic affected CSEC Music preparations? *

Your answer

What have CSEC Music results looked like for your country since the beginning of the pandemic, in comparison with previous years? *



Your answer

In your opinion, how has the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the standard of secondary school music education offerings of your country? *

Your answer

Have any efforts been made to collaborate with other regional stakeholders in order to highlight best practices and derive a new standard of delivering Music Education in a virtual/blended space? Elaborate on these efforts. *

Your answer

Speak on your outlook for Secondary Music Education in your country and the Caribbean region going into the future, i.e. post COVID-19. *

Your answer

ANY OTHER THOUGHTS OR COMMENTS:

Your answer

Submit