

Teachers' perceptions of declining participation in school music
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Abstract

Low enrolment and high attrition rate are pressing issues facing school music in Australia. Based on a sociocognitive perspective, the current study explored music teachers' perceptions of the extent of, reasons for and factors influencing continuing enrolment in music. The findings showed that both classroom and instrumental music teachers perceived a general decline in student enrolment in music in high school. However, instrumental teachers perceived that relatively higher percentages of students tended to continue with instrumental music. Music teachers ranked the importance of various cognitive and social factors relevant to students' continuing and discontinuing participation in music learning in school. Regression analyses showed that parental support and quality music program were significant factors predicting teachers' perceptions of student persistence levels in instrumental and classroom music respectively. The paper ends with a discussion on the development of reformative music pedagogy.

Keywords: drop out, persistence, participation, motivation, music education, teachers' perceptions

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Introduction

Declining participation in school music is a significant educational problem identified in different countries such as Britain (Bray, 2000), Australia (Pascoe et al., 2005) and Hong Kong (e.g. Leung, So & Lee, 2008). In Australia, the 2005 National Review of School Music Education, consistent with a prior national investigation (Stevens, 2003), pinpointed low enrolment and high attrition rate in music as pressing issues that need urgent action (Pascoe et al., 2005, p.52). The number of students who completed Year 12 music was about 4% to 6% of the total student population between 1988 and 2001 (Stevens, 2003). While the overall Year 12 completion rate in music has significantly improved over the past decade, music remains the least attractive subject compared to other curriculum studies within the Arts Key Learning Area (DEST, 2005, cited in Pascoe et al., 2005).

Limited attention has been given to understand how music teachers perceive the issue of declining enrolment. Understanding this issue from teachers' perspectives is important. First, music teachers working in different teaching contexts may hold different perceptions about declining enrolment in school music. In this study, both classroom music and instrumental music teachers were surveyed. Classroom and instrumental music represent two distinct offerings of music education in Queensland schools. Classroom music as part of the school curriculum is compulsory for *all* students up to Year 8; from Year 9 onwards, students can take it as an elective subject. Instrumental music programs are offered to *selected* students from Year 3 onwards. To be offered a place in the instrumental programs, students are tested at the end of Year 2 and Year 4. Music tests such as the Selmer test are administered. In addition students are assessed for their physical

abilities on a range of instruments. The academic ability and behaviour of a child are also taken into account before an offer of a place in an instrumental program is made. Apparently, classroom music teachers and instrumental teachers teach different music curriculum to different student groups. It is likely that classroom and instrumental music teachers may hold different perceptions about students' continuing participation in music learning.

Second, there is a close relationship between teachers' perceptions and their actions (Biddle & Anderson, 1986). For example, Harde and Sullivan (2008) found that teachers' perceptions of students' motivation influenced the strategies they used to intervene and engage students. Music teachers' beliefs and understanding of declining enrolment in music will influence how they structure the learning environment (Shavelson & Stern, 1981) and what reformative strategies they consider viable for promoting music learning and participation. An understanding of how teachers think about declining enrolment in music and what they consider important for students' participatory decisions about music learning will help understand the possible plans of action that these teachers may consider appropriate. Unless teachers consider the issue pressing and certain innovation viable, it is impossible for teachers to commit and make necessary change to their teaching practices.

As part of a research project that examines the nature of declining participation in school music, the current study explored teachers' perceptions of the extent of, reasons for, and important factors affecting declining music enrolment in school. Teachers' perceptions of these issues will have implications for understanding their roles in promoting music participation.

Review of relevant literature

School music in this study refers to both taking music as an academic subject and learning to play a musical instrument as part of the instrumental music programs in Queensland schools. In the extant literature, there is a focus of investigation on motivation and participation in learning and playing musical instruments (e.g. Hallam, 1998; Gouzouasis, Henrey, & Belliveau, 2008; Klinedinst, 1991; Moore, Burland, & Davidson, 2003). Relatively few studies, however, have investigated the problem of low enrolment in classroom music in school. Bray (2000) offered several hypothetical reasons regarding the low uptake level of music in Britain, which included the failure to meet students' needs and interests, perceived unimportance of music education, discriminatory practice in school against music education, students' perceived difficulties in learning music, and music's suitability as an examination subject. While some of these conjectures make intuitive sense, Bray's proposed reasons lack a theoretical base. Lamont and Maton (2008) have recently criticized Bray's proposed reasons as "suggestive descriptions of potential questions to be addressed" rather than providing us with "theoretically informed, empirically based explanations" (Lamont & Maton, 2008, p.268).

The current study uses a motivational perspective to understand students' declining participation in music learning in school. Students' choice to continue learning music is taken as an indicator of motivation (Maehr, Pintrich & Linnenbrink, 2002).

Dominant motivational models such as achievement goal theory and self-efficacy theory have adopted a sociocognitive perspective that highlights the importance of cognitive and social factors, as well as their complex interplay in understanding

motivated behaviours (e.g. Covington, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Schunk, 1991). More recently, music education researchers (e.g. Austin, Renwick & McPherson, 2006; Hallam, 2002) have proposed research frameworks in line with a sociocognitive perspective for exploring motivation in music learning. Empirical evidence regarding how important personal and social factors interact with each other affecting students' motivation and intention to learn music has also been reported (e.g. McCormick & McPherson, 2003; Sichivitsa, 2007). Using a sociocognitive perspective, this study therefore focuses on teachers' perceptions of significant cognitive and social factors that will impact on students' continuing or discontinuing participation in school music; these factors can be taken as potential reasons capable of explaining why students intend to continue or discontinue music learning in school.

Students' valuing of subject matter, competence beliefs, and personal interest are important cognitive variables that will have positive effects on persistence, engagement and long-term motivation (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Wigfield, Eccles, & Rodriguez, 1998). It can be expected that when students generally consider that they have a high ability to do well in music, find learning music interesting and consider music education important, they will be more likely to continue with music learning. For example, Schmidt (2005) found that students' commitment to band and self concept of ability were significantly related to teachers' rating of their performance and effort, students' self-reported practice time, and solo festival participation. Using path analyses, Sichivitsa (2007) showed that American students' valuing of music and self-concept of ability influenced their intention to participate in formal and informal music activities. In addition, students' prior knowledge and exposure to music are important cognitive factors as they will have implications for

competence belief and motivation to continue learning music, especially instrumental music (Hallam, 1998). While few studies (e.g. Barrett & Smigiel, 2007 studied music enjoyment) have examined personal interest in music learning, motivational research has established its significant role in sustaining learning engagement (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000).

Motivational research has also established the significance of social context in students' motivation. A social context provides not just a backdrop against which students develop their motivation to learn music, it also involves the complex interaction between important social players influencing students' motivation and engagement in learning music. A wealth of music education studies has already explored the importance of parental support in terms of parents' expectations, beliefs and attitudes, their interaction with children, and other familial resources (e.g. Dai & Schader, 2002; McPherson & Davidson, 2002; Moore, Burland, & Davidson, 2003). Parental support and involvement are strongly associated with musical learning outcomes (Zdzinski, 1996). In a review study, McPherson (2009) confirmed the important role of parental support in students' music learning and proposed a research model highlighting that parent-child interaction within specific sociocultural context influences children's continuing desire to participate, expend effort and overcome obstacles in music learning.

Peer support forms another important social layer in students' motivation to continue learning music in school. Simply having exposure to peers who play music in school can be a powerful motivator for students to start learning music themselves (Davidson, 1999). McDonald and Miell (2000) studied collaboration between friends

and found that such an interaction facilitated music productivity and influenced how much music they play. O'Neill (1999) reported that high achievers were far more likely than average achievers to find their peers to be supportive. However, peer influence can be a negative factor. For example, O'Neill and Boulton (1996) found that children would experience more bullying if they played an instrument that was considered inappropriate for their gender.

Finally, at classroom level, teachers provide motivational support to students by using effective pedagogical practices that engage students in music lessons, building positive relationships, and interacting with students during the learning process through verbal encouragement. Pitts (2004) studied the importance of teachers' support, relationships and feedback in music learning. Teachers' support in the form of encouragement and positive reinforcement is especially important for students who lack confidence or have doubts about their abilities to learn music (cf. Richards & Durrant, 2003). The creation of a supportive learning environment that builds positive relationships, promotes learning and performance is critically important (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007). At school level, the amount of resources and relative status of music among other school curriculum form an important supportive environment to motivate students to learn (Pascoe et al., 2005). Schools that have a long tradition in music learning and achievement are more likely to provide students with an engaging social context for music education in which music learning and achievement are valued.

Taken together, past studies have identified and explored various important cognitive and social factors that motivate students to engage in music learning. These factors provide us with a meaningful way to understand students' decisions to continue or

discontinue classroom music or instrumental music in high school. Seldom have these factors been considered simultaneously in a single research (for exception please see Sichivista, 2007). In this study, we aimed to explore how music teachers perceive these factors and whether they consider these factors significant for explaining students' continuing and discontinuing participation in school music.

Teachers' perceptions are relevant and critical in improving our understanding of the nature and causes of declining participation in school music. How teachers perceive the problem of declining participation in music learning will probably constrain what plans of action they consider effective to reverse the downward trend, the critical role they play and the way they re-structure their teaching and learning arrangements (cf. Shavelson & Stern, 1981), which in turn, will definitely have an impact on students' sustained engagement in learning music.

Three research questions were set up for the survey:

1. To what extent do music teachers perceive a decline in continuing participation in classroom music and instrumental music in high school?
2. What are the important reasons that these music teachers use to explain why students continue or discontinue with classroom music and instrumental music learning?
3. What are the facilitating and constraining social factors that teachers consider important for understanding the declining participation in classroom music and instrumental music learning?

Method

Participants

The participants were practising music teachers in Queensland schools. An invitation letter, together with the survey, was sent to 250 music teachers. Follow-up contacts including the sending of a reminder letter, re-sending of the questionnaire and phoning non-respondents were used to improve the response rate. In total, 120 music teachers completed and returned the questionnaire, a cumulative response rate of 48%.

Social scientists hold varying opinions about acceptable response rates for postal surveys, which can range between 30% and 70% (Goyder, 1985). According to Babbie (1990, p.182) and Kidder (1981, p.150-151), the current response rate (48%) is acceptable for a postal survey. In addition, Cook, Health and Thomson (2000) argue that response representativeness is more important than response rate. A low response rate does not necessarily mean a threat to research validity, especially when representative participants are involved (Dillman, 1991; Hikmet & Chen, 2003). For the current study, representative participants should involve practising music teachers who are professionally active. To access such a group of professional music teachers, we have specifically surveyed the music teachers who attended a music education conference held in 2007 for professional music teachers in Queensland. These music teachers were professionally active; over 75% actively participated in various communities of musicians. In terms of music training, 90.8% of the participants had instrumental training and 41.7% had vocal training. In terms of teaching qualification, these teachers were holders of a professional degree in education (54.1%), music (28.4%), or other related disciplines (17.5%). The majority of these teachers had

more than 10 years of experience in teaching music in Queensland schools (54.2%); 23.6% had less than 5 years of teaching experience in school music and 19.5% taught school music for 6 to 10 years. 44.1% participants identified themselves as classroom music teachers and 38.1% as instrumental teachers. 17.8% was responsible for both classroom and instrumental music.

Design of survey

Based on a sociocognitive perspective (cf. Covington, 2000; Dweck & Leggett, 1988), the survey was designed to assess teachers' perceptions of the extent of, reasons for and factors influencing music participation in Australian schools. The survey contains three main parts. The first part required music teachers to estimate the percentage of students who continue with classroom and instrumental music at various year levels in high school, Year 8, the first year of high school in Queensland, Year 9 the last year of middle school, and Year 11 the second year of senior grades. Appendix A shows the five items used in this part of the survey. Teachers rated these items on a 7-point Likert scale. A low score on these items means that teachers perceived a low percentage of students would continue taking music or learning instrumental music at specified year levels.

The second part of the survey required music teachers to evaluate the reasons that explain why students continue or discontinue classroom and instrumental music.

Based on our literature review in the previous section (e.g. Barrett & Smigiel, 2007; Hallam, 1998; McDonald and Miell, 2000; McPherson, 2009; Pascoe et al., 2005; Pitts, 2004; Schmidt, 2005; Sichivitsa, 2007), in total, 11 reasons were identified. In line with a sociocognitive perspective on motivation, these 11 reasons include both

cognitive factors (personal interest, valuing of music education, confidence, exposure to music, previous knowledge and learning) and social factors (parental encouragement, teachers' support, peer support, school resources, relative status of music education among other school curriculum, and quality of music program). In completing this part of the survey, music teachers were required to select and rank five most important reasons (5=highest rank and 1=lowest rank). Asking participants to rank a list of items has been considered a reliable and valid research method for assessing perceived relative importance (e.g. Alwin & Krosnick, 2004; Juniper et al., 1999; Fuchs & Sox Jr., 2001; Maio, Roese, Seligman & Katz, 1996). Appendix A shows items used in this part of the survey.

The third part of the survey contains 40 items that examine music teachers' views about facilitating and constraining contextual factors that are important for understanding students' participation in school music. In designing the items in this section, we consulted the extant literature, including the recent national reviews on Australian school music education (Pascoe et al., 2005; Stevens, 2003). The items covered social support derived from parents, friends and teachers, and important school factors related to music education programs, school climate, and principal's support. Two music educators reviewed the items and their suggestions for improvement were incorporated in the final version of this part of the survey.

These 40 items were subjected to a factor-analysis using principal-component method with varimax rotation. Eigenvalues, scree-plots, and internal consistencies were used to determine the number of factors. Seven distinct factors were found, including parental *discouragement*, *peer influence*, *quality music program*, *parental*

disaffection, supportive school climate, principal's support, and teacher efficacy.

Each factor accounted for a unique percentage of variance, and in total, 68.76% of the total variance. Items with loading less than .40 were not considered in forming the factors. Table 1 shows the eigenvalue, percentage of variance explained and Cronbach Alpha value for each of these factors. Items forming each factor were listed in the Appendix A.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results

This study raised three research questions central to understanding teachers' perceptions of declining participation in school music. The first question examined teachers' views on the percentage of students who continue with classroom and instrumental music in high school.

Figure 1 and 2 shows that teachers perceived a declining trend in the percentage of continuing students in taking music as an academic subject. Most teachers considered that only a small percentage of students would continue with classroom music at Years 9 and 11. More specifically, 64.9% and 78.6% of teachers generally thought that only around 20-30% of music students would continue taking music at Year 9 and at Year 11 respectively. Non-significant ANOVA results indicated that classroom and instrumental music teachers were not different from each other in their ratings on the percentage of student continuing with classroom music learning in year 9 and 11.

Insert Figure 1 and 2 about here

As shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5, teachers' ratings on the percentage of continuing students in instrumental music were rather different from those on classroom music. Most teachers, 26.4%, 25% and 25.6% for Years 8, 9 and 11 respectively, considered that 60% or more instrumental music students would continue with instrumental music.

The results were less clear cut, however, when teachers' ratings were combined together. Combining teachers' ratings on the higher end of the scale in these items (i.e. 6 and 7) showed encouraging results. In particular, 43.4%, 43.5% and 34.5% of teachers considered that more than 50% of students would continue with instrumental music in Years 8, 9 and 11 respectively. However, when collapsing teachers' ratings on the lower end of the scale (1 to 3) together, the results showed that a rather substantial number of teachers considered that there was a general decline in the number of students continuing with instrumental music. More specifically, 31%, 31.5% and 45.6% of the teachers perceived that less than 20-30% of students would continue their instrumental music at Years 8, 9 and 11 respectively.

Significant ANOVA results indicated that instrumental teachers considered that more students would continue with their instrumental music than did classroom teachers in Year 9 ($F_{(2, 90)}=5.12, p<.05$) and year 11 ($F_{(2, 88)}=6.90, p<.005$). The average mean

scores of instrumental teachers indicated that they perceived about 40 to 50% of students would continue with their instrumental music while classroom music teachers had a substantially lower estimation at the level of 20 to 30%.

Insert Figure 3, 4 and 5 about here

The results confirmed that music teachers perceived a general decline in the number of students taking music as an academic subject. However, this perceived decline was less clear cut in instrumental music. Instrumental teachers considered that more students would continue with instrument learning in high school, though a substantial portion of teachers considered a similar declining trend in student enrolment in instrumental music.

The second research question examined what reasons music teachers considered important for explaining students' declining or continuing participation in both classroom and instrumental music learning. We asked music teachers to rank five most important reasons (out of 11) that can explain why students continue or discontinue classroom and instrumental music learning. Teachers assigned rank 1 to 5 to five important reasons, with 5 being the most important. Table 2 and 3 show the percentage, total rank score and average rank score for each of the reasons. The total rank score is the sum of ranks for each reason and therefore can be taken as an indicator of the general importance of a reason. The average rank score represents the

average importance of a reason and was derived from dividing the total rank score by the number of teachers who selected a particular reason.

Insert Table 2 and 3 about here

According to the total rank scores, the five most important reasons explaining why students discontinue with classroom music were: *low curriculum status, perceived unimportance, parental discouragement, lack of interest, and peer discouragement*. These five reasons were also ranked as most important reasons for explaining why students discontinue with instrumental training. An examination of the average rank scores confirmed the relative importance of these factors. However, a closer look at the average rank scores drew our attention to the relatively high average rank scores in poor music program indicating that teachers on average considered that adverse effects of school factors may contribute to the declining participation in both classroom and instrumental music. As for instrumental music, in addition to perceived importance and lack of interest, a lack of confidence was also important, as indicated by its high average rank score.

Regarding the important reasons for explaining why students continue with classroom and instrumental music, music teachers rated personal interest, rich music experiences, valuing music, parental encouragement, and quality music programs as the five most important reasons. The average rank scores confirmed the importance of these reasons. Taken together, teachers have rated students' own cognitive factors

such as valuing, interest and experiences as important factors promoting participation in music. As for social factors, more emphasis was placed on parental support and teachers' capability in designing a quality music program.

The final research question in this study was about the relationship between factors that are generally considered important to music learning and teachers' perceptions of declining participation in music learning. To facilitate this analysis, we constructed two new variables. First, *teachers' perceived student persistence level in classroom music* is the sum of scores derived from merging the scores of teachers' perceptions of percentage of students continuing with classroom music in year 9 and 11. Second, *teachers' perceived student persistence level in instrument music* is the sum of scores derived from three items assessing teachers' perceptions on the percentage of students continuing with their instrument learning in Years 8, 9 and 11. A high score in these two constructs represents that teachers perceived that more students would continue with their music learning in high school either as a school subject or as instrumental training. A correlational analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teachers' perceptions of students' persistence in music learning and the seven important variables in learning music the factor analysis produced. Table 4 shows the correlation between these variables.

Insert Table 4 about here

The correlation analyses showed that quality music programs ($r=.23, p<.001$) was positively associated with teachers' perception of persistence in classroom music

while a negative relationship was recorded with parental disaffection ($r=-.26, p<.001$).

As for teachers' perception of student persistence level in instrumental music learning, significant negative association was found in parental discouragement ($r=-.33, p<.001$), parental disaffection ($r=-.23, p<.001$) and peer influence ($r=-.23, p<.001$).

To analyse the relative importance of this list of positive and negative factors in predicting teachers' perceptions of students' persistence in classroom and instrumental music learning, two separate hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted. Teachers' perceptions of student persistence levels in classroom and instrumental music were taken as the dependent variables. The seven independent variables were entered using a stepwise procedure, which weights the variables equally. The resulting regression models were significant in predicting teachers' perceptions of students' persistence in classroom music, $F_{(1, 71)}=4.53, p<.05$ and their perceptions of students' persistence in instrumental music, $F_{(1, 74)}=8.93, p<.001$. Quality music programs ($\beta=.25, p<.001$) was the only significant variable in the final regression model predicting teachers' perception of student persistence level in classroom music. As for the final model predicting teachers' perception of student persistence level in instrumental learning, parental discouragement ($\beta=-.33, p<.001$) was the only significant variable. Nonsignificant ANOVA results indicated that classroom and instrumental music teachers did not differ in their scores on these variables. The findings corroborated with teachers' ranking of the importance of parental encouragement and quality music programs.

Discussion

The current study investigated the views of Australian music teachers on the nature and causes of declining enrolment in school music. Music teachers in this study generally considered that more students tend to discontinue classroom music in high school. This result was consistent with the recent national reports on music education in Australia (Pascoe et al., 2005 & Stevens, 2003). However, this view was not shared among instrumental teachers who considered that students tended to continue with their instrumental training in high school. This may be related to the fact that instrumental music teachers focus on educating a small group of students who join the instrumental programs through a selection process while classroom music teachers need to teach and accommodate diverse needs of all students in their compulsory lessons.

In addition, it is likely that instrumental teachers teach a group of more motivated students. Several American studies have shown that students attracted to instrumental music are usually achieving (Fitzpatrick, 2006; Kinney, 2008) and more motivated to continue music learning for they are more efficacious, supported by families and hold high expectation (Kinney, 2008). Instrumental teachers usually build a close relationship with their students (cf. Coster-Giomo, Flowers, & Sasaki, 2005), which may have contributed to a more positive view about students' continual participation in instrumental music. This new finding warns us against making generalised statements regarding students' continuing participation in diverse music learning opportunities in school. Certainly, there is a need to further differentiate music participation in different music learning contexts such as school bands, choirs, orchestras and explore students' continuing participation in them separately.

Music teachers' ranking of important reasons for explaining continuing and discontinuing participation in school music has drawn our attention to cognitive factors such as personal interest and valuing of music learning. This finding is consistent with studies that highlight the importance of personal attitudes and intention (Hallam, 1998) in music learning and consistent with the research that highlights the importance of the development of enjoyment and sense of purposes in learning music (Barrett & Semigial, 2007).

Past studies have indicated the significant role of students' self-efficacy beliefs in music performance (e.g. McCormick & McPherson, 2003; McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Schmidt, 2005). In line with these previous studies, music teachers considered that students' confidence in their abilities was rather important in learning musical instruments. However, teachers' ranking of students' confidence in their abilities was relatively low for studying music. One may wonder why music teachers did not rank students' confidence of their abilities important for the participation of classroom music. One reason may be that taking music as an academic subject may not demand a high sense of efficacy often assumed in instrumental music in which students are often required to perform publicly. Another possible explanation may be related to the outcome variable at issue that focused teachers on students' continuing participation in classroom music rather than students' performance on specific music tasks.

Harackiewicz and colleagues (2000 & 2002) provided empirical evidence for their argument that different forms of motivation will have differential effects on different learning outcomes. Following this logic, it can be argued that music teachers might have considered students' personal interest and valuing more critical than self-efficacy in supporting continuing participation in classroom music. Students' self-

efficacy should be important if we ask teachers to rank factors that affect students' musical performance on specific tasks in music classes (cf. McCormick & McPherson, 2003).

As for social factors, teachers' rankings focused on the importance of parental support and to a lesser extent, peer influence, especially in relation to the learning of instrumental music. These ranking results were corroborated in the subsequent analyses using correlation and regression, which highlighted the significance of negative parental support in the form of discouragement and disaffection. In the final model for predicting teachers' perceptions of students' persistence in instrumental music, parental discouragement was the only significant factor in the model. This highlights the important role of parental support in instrumental music learning and is consistent with the extant literature about its significance (e.g. McPherson, 2009; Sichivitsa, 2007; Zdzinski, 1996).

Schools and classrooms form the most immediate social context for music participation. Music teachers assigned the highest rank to "low curriculum status" as the reason for students quitting music learning. This was not surprising, as many studies have discussed the problem of the relative importance of music within the school curriculum (e.g. Russell-Bowie, 1993; Stevens, 2003). However, this highly ranked factor was not significant in predicting teachers' perceptions of students' continuing participation in music learning. Instead, music teachers focused on the design and delivery of a quality music program for promoting continuing participation in both classroom and instrumental music. The regression results showed that a quality music program was the only significant variable predicting teachers'

perceptions of students' persistence in taking music as an academic subject in school. This result of course highlights the critical role teachers have in promoting continual music participation.

Juxtaposing these two findings, i.e. low curriculum status as the reason for students quitting music and provision of quality music programs as one that promotes continual participation, exposes an important dilemma in music education. Music teachers while lamenting the low curriculum status of music did not focus on lobbying parents, school administrators and policy makers to make appropriate changes in their value orientations or policies. Instead they concentrated on what they could do in delivering engaging and effective music programs. The regression analyses provided empirical support for this argument. We believe that this represents music teachers' practical wisdom and professional commitment in focusing on what they possibly can do to improve the enrolment situation.

However, our study did not investigate teachers' views about quality music programs and cannot provide answers to specific questions such as what should be counted as a quality music program for promoting music participation or retention in enrolment. While future studies need to further explore music teachers' understanding of quality music programs, the current findings provide some insight into this important pedagogical issue. Taken together, our results crafted a special perspective about music participation based on teachers' perceptions. From teachers' perspective, sustained music participation is more than a pedagogical issue restricted to the classroom milieu. Students' continual participation in music learning involves support

from parents and peers and is embedded in complicated social beliefs and values related to music learning held among these stakeholders.

To a certain extent, the current results can be interpreted as painting a gloomy future for music education in Australia because music teachers perceived that the issue of declining participation involved complex social issues and processes beyond their control. However, these results can also be taken as a starting point for developing effective reformative pedagogy and curriculum in music education that promotes sustained participation and engagement. Such a reformative pedagogy, according to teachers' perceptions in this study, should focus on developing a learning environment that promotes students' personal interests and valuing of music learning, and effectively deals with negative influences such as parental discouragement.

Effective teaching in music education therefore may mean not just quality classroom instruction but also informed guidance on how social support especially that derived from parents can be solicited to sustain students' continual participation. Strategies such as the establishment of parent music support groups and sharing and discussing with parents about the benefits of music learning on academic achievement in other school subjects (e.g. Babo, 2004) may become part of a reformative music pedagogy for sustaining participation. Of course, music teachers may act on their beliefs and perceptions in different ways. Future studies should look into how classroom and instrumental music teachers holding different views about music participation engage themselves in pedagogical reforms to promote sustained participation in music learning within various social and educational constraints.

Understanding how teachers perceive the problem of declining participation in school music is an initial step for searching innovative measures to promote music education. The current study used a mailed survey to explore teachers' perceptions on declining enrolment in classroom and instrumental music. To enrich the results, selected teachers should be interviewed. The current study was of course limited by its focus on teachers' perceptions which cannot be equated with students' actual participatory decisions. To further understand the problem of declining music enrolment and to promote music education, future studies need to include students' voices, especially their views of themselves (McPherson & MoCromick, 2000) and about the learning environment (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007). A greater understanding of the relationship between students' learning context, cognitive and affective orientations and their motivation in learning music will be crucial for understanding the issues of declining participation and designing new intervention to reverse the downward trend, which has become the focus for our subsequent research. In addition, a comparative analysis of students' and teachers' views will yield clear indication of whether social beliefs and values on taking music as an academic subject and learning instrumental music are consistent.

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Appendix: Survey items

Part A: Teachers' estimation

1. Based on your observation and experiences, please estimate the percentage of students who continue classroom music in a/ year 9 and b/year 11

- 1=less than 10%
- 2=between 10-20%
- 3=between 20-30%
- 4=between 30-40%
- 5=between 40-50%
- 6=between 50-60%
- 7=60% or more

2. Based on your observation and experiences, please estimate the percentage of students who continue instrumental music in a/year 8, b/year 9, and c/ year 11.

- 1=less than 10%
- 2=between 10-20%
- 3=between 20-30%
- 4=between 30-40%
- 5=between 40-50%
- 6=between 50-60%
- 7=60% or more

Part B: Ranking important reasons

Based on your own understanding and observations, please rank the five most important reasons (5 to 1; 5=the highest rank or the most important reason) why students tend to drop a/ classroom music; and b/instrumental music in high school

1. A lack of interest (lack of interest)
2. Music education is considered relatively less important (perceived importance)
3. A lack of confidence in doing music (lack of confidence)
4. A lack of relevant knowledge and skills (lack of knowledge)
5. Limited exposure to music (limited exposure)
6. Parents did not encourage students to take music (parental discouragement)
7. Compared to other school curriculum, music is less important (low curriculum status)
8. Music teachers did not encourage students to continue their learning (lack of teacher support)
9. The music program in my school is underdeveloped (poor music program)
10. Our school did not provide enough necessary resources to develop music education (lack of resources)
11. Peers did not encourage students to classroom music (peer discouragement)

Based on your own understanding and observations, please rank the five most important reasons (5 to 1; 5=the highest rank or the most important reason) why some students have elected to continue studying a/classroom music; and b/ instrumental music in high school.

1. Personal interest in music (personal interest)
2. Rich experiences in music activities (rich experiences)
3. Students see music as relevant for their future studies or career (valuing music)
4. Adequate instrumental training (adequate training)
5. Parents encourage students to take music (parental encouragement)
6. Music teachers have designed and delivered a quality music program (quality music program)
7. Our school emphasizes music development (school climate)
8. Compared to all other school curriculum, music is generally considered as equally important (equal curriculum status)
9. Our school provides adequate resources for the delivery of a quality music education (adequate resources)
10. Our students have been exposed to diverse forms of music activities in and out of school (music exposure)
11. Peers encourage students to take instrumental music (peer encouragement)

Part C: Constraining and facilitating factors

Parental discouragement (5 items)

- Parents often encourage their children to drop classroom music after Year 8
- Parents often encourage their children to drop classroom music after Year 10
- Parents often encourage their children to drop instrumental music after Year 7
- Parents often encourage their children to drop instrumental music after Year 8
- Parents often encourage their children to drop instrumental music after Year 10

Peer influence (4 items)

- It is not considered cool to be a student in the music program
- Students in my school generally discourage their peers from engaging in elective classroom or instrumental music
- In my school, kids who play musical instruments are admired by their peers (reverse coded)
- Students in my school generally discourage their peers from engaging in elective music

Quality music program (6 items)

- Students in my school have many opportunities to participate in music activities and performance
- The music programs in my school expose students to diverse forms of music from different cultures
- Students in my school participate in music activities and experiences that help them express their understanding and appreciation of music

- The musical programs in my school cater for students' diverse needs
- Students are given opportunities to explore and experience music activities and works originated from diverse categories of genres
- The music programs in my school expose students to diverse forms of music from different cultures

Parental disaffection (4 items)

- I don't think the parents of my students expect us to spend a lot of time on teaching music
- The parents of my students do not care if music education in my school is given sufficient time, space and resources
- Parents often seek opportunities for their children to engage in different forms of music training or activities outside school (reverse coded)
- In my interaction with the parents in my school, I am seldom asked to discuss issues related to the music development of individual students

Supportive school climate (4 items)

- I think music is considered as a relatively less important study area in my school than other Key Learning Areas (reverse-coded)
- My school encourages every student to participate in at least one aspect of the music program
- In my school, students can choose to participate in music activities that meet their personal interest and needs
- My school offers a wide range of music programs for our students

Principal's support (3 items)

- My principal or school management executives provide adequate support that I need for the design and delivery of a quality music program
- My principal or school management executives encourage me to participate in continuing professional activities related to music education
- I found it hard to deliver quality music programs because of limited resources my school assigns (reverse-coded)

Teacher efficacy (2 items)

- I have abundant practical music experience to support the development of quality music programs in my school
- Given sufficient time and effort, I'm confident to deliver quality music programs that engage students in a wide range of musical styles

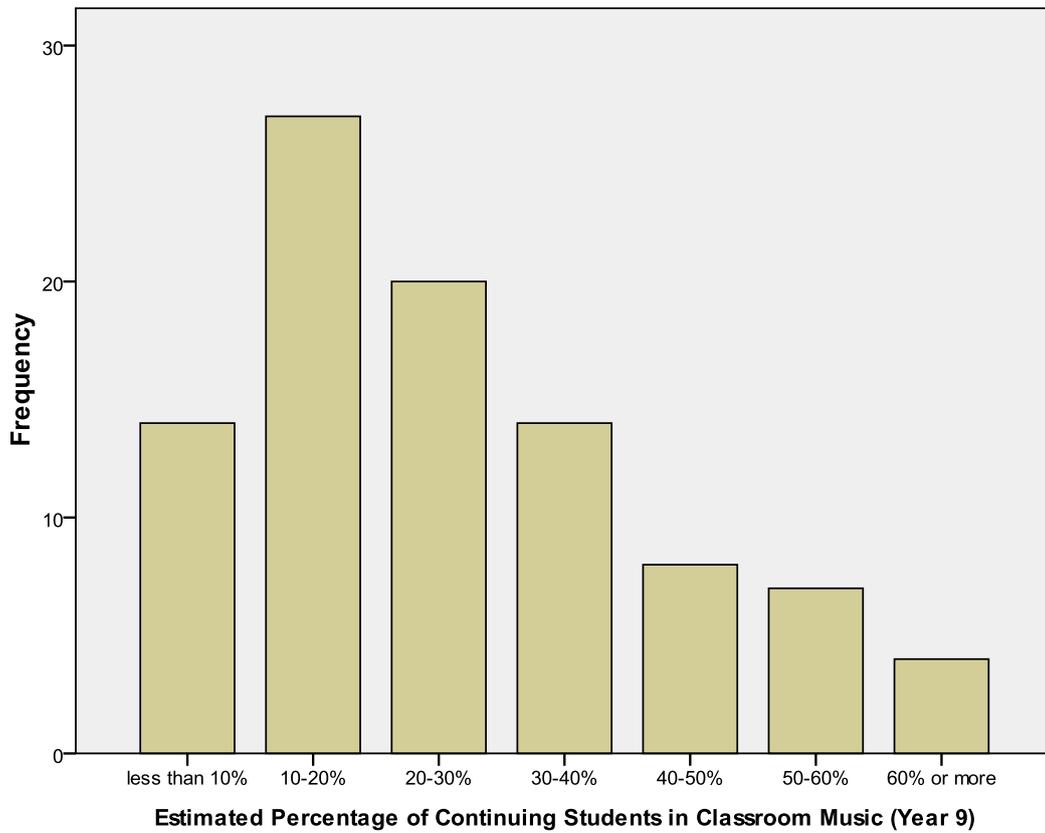


Figure 1. Teachers' Estimation of Continuing Students in Classroom Music at Year 9

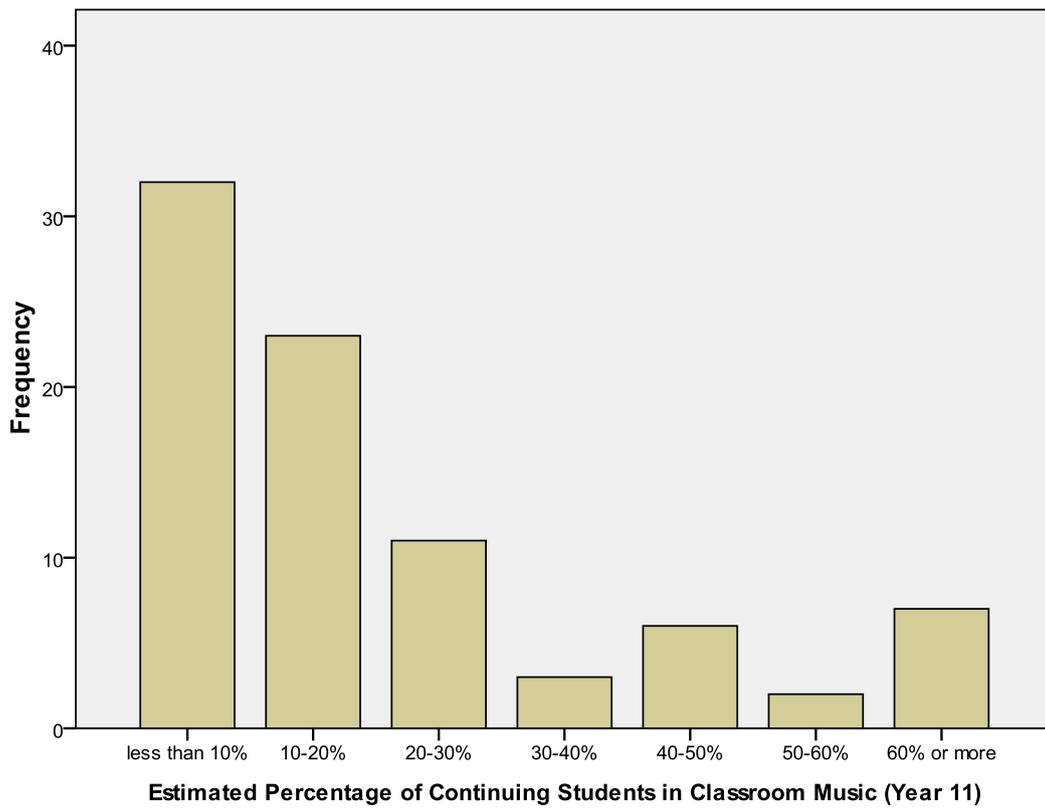


Figure 2. Teachers' Estimation of Continuing Students in Classroom Music at Year 11

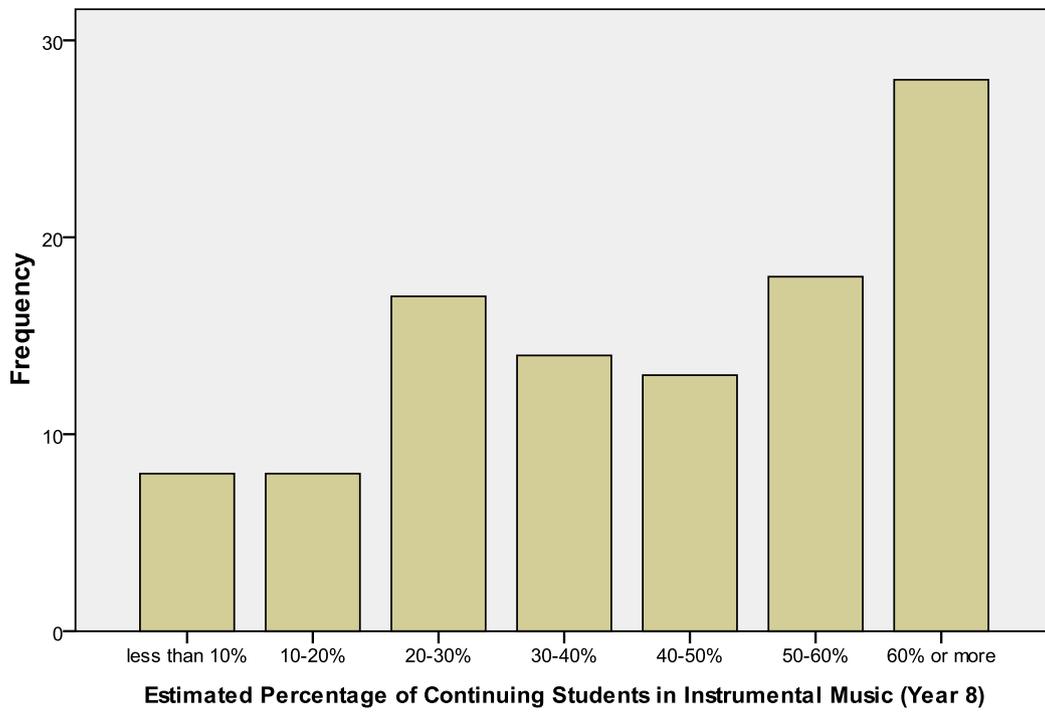


Figure 3. Teachers' Estimation of Continuing Students in Instrumental Music at Year 8

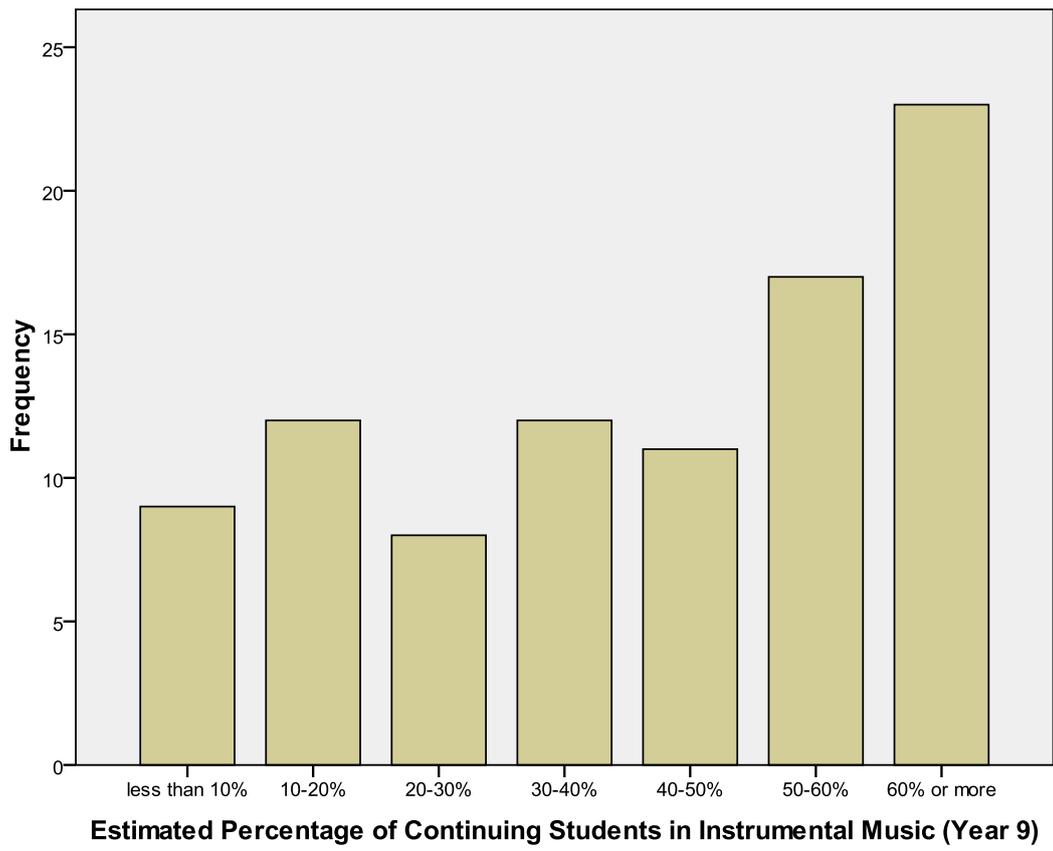


Figure 4. Teachers' Estimation of Continuing Students in Instrumental Music at Year 9

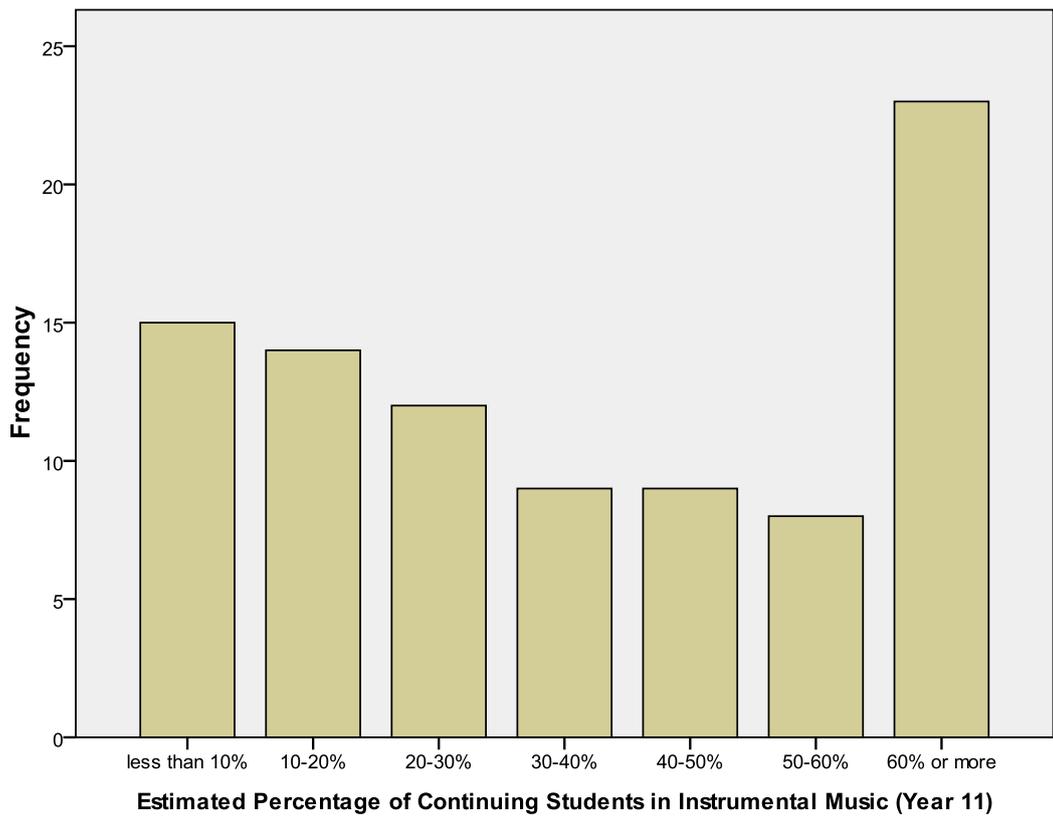


Figure 5. Teachers' Estimation of Continuing Students in Instrumental Music at Year 11

Table 1. Constraining or Facilitating Factors affecting students' continuing participation in school music

Factors	Eigenvalues	% of variance explained	No. of items (Cronbach Alpha)
Parental discouragement	8.04	12.10	5 items (.85)
Peer influence	3.32	11.93	4 items (.87)
Quality music program	2.45	11.48	6 items (.81)
Parental disaffection	1.80	9.75	4 items (.77)
Supportive school climate	1.42	8.40	4 items (.64)
Principal's support	1.20	8.14	3 items (.77)
Teacher efficacy	1.06	6.96	2 items (.64)

Table 2. Ranking of Reasons for Dropping Classroom and Instrumental Music

	Percentage (Number) of teachers selected		Total Rank Score		Average Rank Score	
	classroom	Instrument	classroom	Instrument	classroom	Instrument
Lack of interest	55% (66)	71.7% (86)	153	265	2.51	3.08
Perceived importance	57.5% (69)	62.5% (75)	199	175	2.88	2.33
Lack of confidence	39.2% (47)	43.3% (52)	101	144	2.15	2.77
Lack of knowledge	28.3% (34)	31.7% (38)	80	93	2.35	2.45
Limited exposure	17.5% (21)	29.1% (35)	43	57	2.05	1.90
Parental discouragement	49.2% (59)	61.7% (74)	158	191	2.68	2.58
Low Curriculum status	53.3% (64)	63.3% (76)	204	206	3.19	2.71
Lack of Teacher support	5% (6)	10.8% (13)	10	33	1.66	2.54
Poor music program	20.8% (25)	20% (24)	70	70	2.80	2.92
Lack of resources	15% (18)	18.3% (22)	51	44	2.83	2.00
Peer Discouragement	35% (42)	51.7% (62)	106	164	2.52	2.64

Table 3. Ranking of Reasons for Persisting in Classroom and Instrumental Music

	Percentage (Number) of teachers selected		Total Rank Score		Average Rank Score	
	Classroom	Instrument	classroom	Instrument	classroom	Instrument
Personal interest	72.5% (87)	85.8% (103)	347	361	3.99	3.50
Rich experiences	53.3% (64)	59.2% (71)	172	209	2.69	2.94
Valuing music	55% (66)	50% (60)	173	135	2.62	2.25
Adequate training	30.8% (37)	51.7% (62)	68	129	1.84	2.08
Parental encouragement	40% (48)	64.2% (77)	104	192	2.17	2.49
Quality music program	45.8% (55)	59.2% (71)	139	187	2.53	2.63
School climate	15% (18)	15.8% (19)	38	49	2.11	2.58
Equal curriculum status	10% (12)	6.7% (8)	22	18	1.83	2.25
Adequate resources	16.7% (20)	25% (30)	31	55	1.55	1.83
Music exposure	22.5% (27)	24.2% (29)	56	53	2.07	1.83
Peer encouragement	14.2% (17)	15.8% (19)	35	37	2.06	1.94

Table 4. Inter-correlation

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean	SD
1. Parental discouragement	--									2.83	.68
2. Peer influence	.39**	--								2.62	.84
3. Quality music program	-.16	-.20*	--							4.12	.59
4. Parental disaffection	.28**	.48**	-.21*	--						2.89	.35
5. School climate	-.24**	-.52**	.53**	-.38**	--					3.33	.79
6. Principal's support	-.27**	-.46**	.40**	-.43**	.55**	--				3.39	.95
7. Teaching efficacy	-.17	-.11	.38**	-.16	.23*	.27**	--			4.23	.67
8. Persistence (instrument)	-.33**	-.23*	.20	-.23*	.09	-.01	-.04	--		4.43	1.92
9. Persistence (classroom)	-.14	-.04	.23*	-.25*	.18	.11	.05	.42**	--	2.81	1.59

** p<.01; * p<.05